

^{K.} **MANHUNT**

DETECTIVE STORY MONTHLY

NEW Thrillers by

RICHARD DEMING

FLETCHER FLORA

HAL ELLSON

GIL BREWER

FRANK KANE

FEBRUARY
35 CENTS



**"I had to have someone . . .
and he said I was no good."
(See "FOG")**

**Plus — SAM MERWIN, JR., JACK SWORD, ROY CARROLL
and others**

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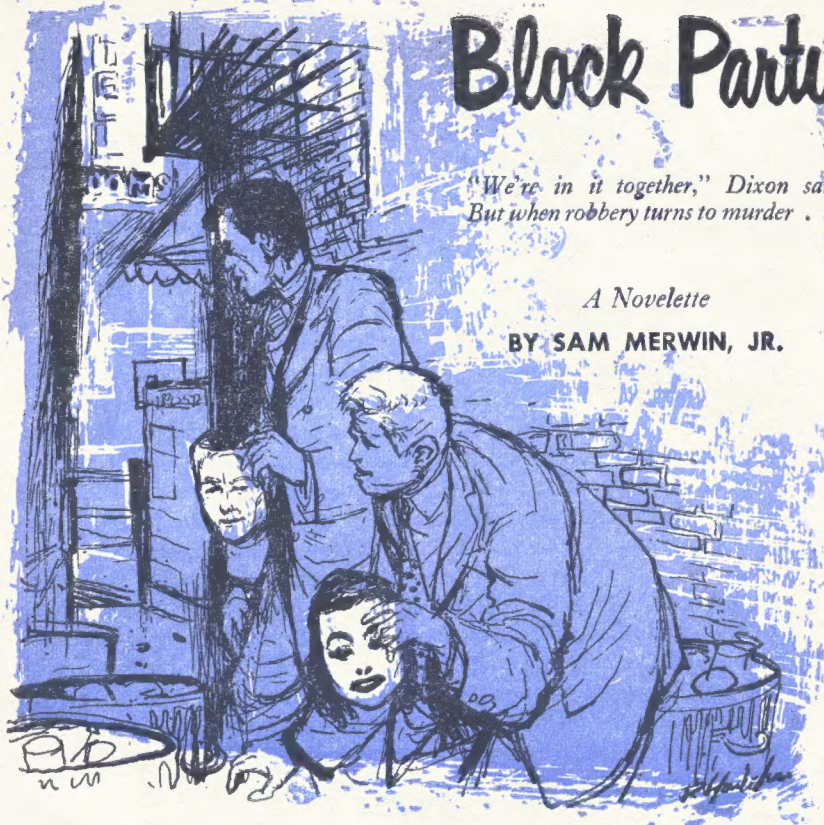
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Block Party

*"We're in it together," Dixon said.
But when robbery turns to murder . . .*

A Novelette

BY SAM MERWIN, JR.



IT WAS three past one in the morning, and the party was almost put away for the night. Where gaudy booths and loud music and spicy, hot Italian foods had lent gaiety, only litter and squalid emptiness remained, both mercifully softened by the East River darkness.

Against the moonswept sky, the sixteen-story shaft of the Hotel Kipp, reared in pre-depression times

as forerunner of a building boom that never developed, dominated its brick-tenement neighbors like some latter-day Gulliver. Hugging its shadow, Tony and Carl lurked in the half-alley between hotel and Mrs. Fiametto's candy-and-newspaper store.

They were waiting, impatiently, for the last vestiges of carnival to remove themselves from the scene.

Tony was a moderately tall young man whose droop and generally languid appearance masked the fact that he was both swift and immensely muscular. Carl, a Nordic rarity in that overwhelmingly Mediterranean district, was fair and short, with a pear-shaped Teutonic build. His outward stolidity concealed intricate inner meshworks of fears and rashnesses.

Both young men held plastic rubber masks in their hands — Tony's a likeness of Hopalong Cassidy, Carl's of Joan Crawford. The Joan Crawford had been Tony's idea. Tony had most of the ideas. "It will mix them up," he'd said. "Make them look for a couple of queers."

"As long as they don't start looking for us," said Carl. "*Kee-rist!* Won't that truck ever pull out?"

"Don't get your drawers in an uproar," said Tony, and his own voice sounded a half-pitch higher than usual. "We gotta play this by the clock, like Dixon told us."

"You sure it'll work?" said Carl after a moment. "I mean, what if something goes haywire?"

"It won't unless we goof," Tony said. "You know what to do when we hit the lobby. The main thing is to do it right — and not to hurry. Like Dixon told us."

This robbery was going to be a pushover, he told himself. The way most of the kids he knew got in trouble was they didn't have a plan for what to do once they'd made their

haul. They got caught with their loot, or spent it so heavily the cops got wise, or tried to sell it the wrong way — which was like asking for a trip to Elmira.

Thanks to Dixon, they were all set. This was a straight business deal. They got a yard apiece and all the cash in the hotel safe. Dixon only wanted the stuff in the Johns dame's envelope. He knew it was in the safe — he'd been on duty as night elevator operator when the playboy's wife deposited it there a week earlier, when she had checked into the Kipp.

Tony thought about Margo Kennet Johns, soon-to-be Jimmy Johns' sixth ex-wife. He had seen her a half dozen times, walking to the corner for a cab or getting out of one in front of the hotel. Not just a dish — a full meal! She made even Myra Fiametto look like a drab hunk of nothing. Margo had it all, and in the right places. No wonder a rich bastard like Jimmy Johns had grabbed her. Tony wondered what it was like to have a pin-up like Margo move in with you — and what it was like to have her move out. Johns should know, he thought. The lucky jerk had had enough of them — both ways.

Carl gave him a poke under the ribs, bringing him out of it. "Tony, the truck!" he whispered.

Except for the dim solitary street light, half way to the corner, and the dim glow of light over the hotel entrance, the block was dark. There

was a clatter as the last of the boothmen got his "office" loaded on a pickup truck, a few words between boothman and driver, then the sound of the truck rumbling around the corner.

"Okay," Tony said. "Put it on." He worked the Hopalong mask over his face. It was hot and it stuck to his skin and, for a moment, until he got the eye-slits in place, he could not see. When he could, he looked around, found Carl still struggling with his Crawford mask. Tony helped him, then said, "Remind me to ask you for a date next Tuesday, gorgeous."

"Cut the clowning." Carl's voice sounded funny and distant from under the plastic.

"Okay," Tony repeated. "Just remember — don't pull your gun till we're inside. Got it?"

Joan Crawford nodded, and Tony suppressed a sudden impulse to laugh. Old Carl looked so *damned* funny wearing that crazy face. He wondered what Margo Kennett Johns had on her play-boy husband in that envelope in the safe — what it could be that would get a guy like Johns to risk a setup like this. He wondered what Dixon was getting for rigging the deal. Plenty, probably.

Dixon was smart. It was his night off. "If I'm on the job when you pull it," he had told Tony, "I'm as good as dead. They'd be asking too many questions. And one of you might goof during the strike and

get me jammed up. I've got to be out of it. But you kids come to my place the minute it's over. Don't stop for anything. Just get over there fast."

It made sense. The whole deal made sense. There were, maybe, a couple of hundred kids in the block who would be suspected. The cops would never pin it down to Carl and himself. Even if they did, the rap was not a bad one — maybe six months or a year — and the pay was okay. Not only the yard, but what they'd get out of the hotel safe. There was bound to be plenty of cash in it, with all those rich screwballs who lived there.

"Come on," Tony said, taking a deep breath. "Let's go."

Five quick paces to the hotel door, then through it, then down three steps to the lobby level. At the rear, the two elevator doors were closed, just as Dixon had said they would be. There was only one elevator working at this time and the night operator was eating his supper in the kitchen. He wouldn't appear for half an hour unless somebody rang for him.

Smitty, the night manager, knew they meant trouble the moment he saw them in their masks, carrying their very real-looking plastic automatics. He was standing behind the desk with his hands on it, and his ruddy face went pale. He just stood there, staring at them, not making a move.

Carl pointed his gun at him while

Tony darted around the end of the desk, past the switchboard, and used it as cover to put his own gun on Smitty. This was the first danger point. If anyone came in while Carl was standing there, alone in the open, it meant trouble. Tony waited, sweating, until he heard Carl's breath at his shoulder.

They had made it.

He said, "All right, man, let's have the key to the safe."

Smitty, still saying nothing, got it out of a drawer under the desk. He looked as if he was going to keel over, and dropped it. Tony steeled himself for the clatter as it hit the imitation-marble floor. But the key landed on Smitty's toe and made almost no noise.

"Pick it up," said Tony softly. Smitty picked it up.

They prodded him into the little office in back of the pigeonhole partition where the guests' mail and messages and room-keys were kept. Tony nodded toward the big steel door set into the far wall. "Open it," he said. Smitty opened it.

Behind the door the safe sat in its steel nest. Tony said, nodding toward the lock, "The combination, and no stalling. You know it." He almost added "Smitty" and the near-lapse shook him hard. He had a crazy feeling, as if he were walking along the edge of a skyscraper top in a high wind.

Smitty twirled the dial, turned it the other way, reversed it again. He gave a yank and the door swung

open. Without looking away, Tony told Carl, "Tie him up." He had almost made another slip — almost called Carl by name.

Carl got busy with the wire he took from his pocket. He was good at that sort of thing. He wound a loop around Smitty's neck, another around his wrists, another around his ankles. He pushed Smitty down on his face on the floor and ran another piece of wire from the loop around his neck to that around his ankles. If Smitty tried to straighten out, he'd garrote himself. Carl had learned the trick from one of the local Korean veterans. They'd used it on prisoners.

Carl gave Smitty a kick, causing him to jerk convulsively. He began to make low gurgling noises. Busy at the safe, Tony said, without looking around, "Make him shut up."

There was the sound of another kick, but the noises kept on. Tony said, "Maybe you tied it too tight."

"No," Carl said. "He's just got a thick neck."

"Leave him alone then and give me a hand."

Some of the stuff in the safe was in steel boxes. Tony and Carl didn't bother with them. They grabbed the heavy brown paper envelopes and stuck them in laundry bags they pulled from under their slacks. The envelopes were stacked alphabetically. Margo Kennett Johns' was near the middle. Tony gave a grunt of relief as he spotted the scrawled autograph at its top. He had been

unable to repress a fear that she might have pulled it out before they got to it.

But she hadn't. Its bulk was reassuring. He slipped it inside his shirt so it wouldn't get mixed up with the others. "Hurry up, man," he whispered to Carl. "We ain't got all night."

"But you said . . ." Carl stopped and looked at him and the Joan Crawford face was grotesque.

"Never mind what I said — *move it!*" Tony snapped. In the silence that followed, he was relieved that Smitty had stopped kicking up a fuss. Which was good. He had nothing, personally, against Smitty. Hell, he'd even played pinball with him in the candy store sometimes, before Smitty went on duty. He was a great one for body-English — and resultant *tilt* signs.

Tony froze as footsteps, uneven footsteps, sounded in the lobby. There were two of them, a man and a woman. A deep voice said, "Hey there, Smitty, where are you? Want a drink, you old crud?"

There was a feminine giggle, then: "Jake, don't be so vulgar!"

"Look who's talking!" was the jeering male reply. "Okay, Smitty, if you don't want it, you don't get it."

More footsteps, then the loud peal of the night elevator bell. Tony listened, his every nerve-end quivering, his every pore open. He wished to hell it weren't Dixon's night off. What if the other night

man came to the desk? What if he looked in back and found them? Tony picked up his plastic pistol from where he had put it on the floor.

The door to the kitchen in back swung open. This was the moment. Tony waited, setting himself for the bluff he might have to pull. But all he heard was: "Morning, Mr. Wilson — morning, Miss Causey." There followed some muttered rumbles of indistinct conversation, then the lift door slammed shut.

Tony grabbed his laundry bag. He stood up. He said, "Move it, Carl!"

They slipped out the hotel door and made the turn into the alley. There they stripped off their masks and dropped them in an ash-can. Let the cops find them. They wouldn't learn anything Smitty couldn't tell them. Tony slipped his plastic pistol back into his slacks pocket, motioned Carl to do the same. They took off the gloves Dixon had given them for the job.

For some reason, Tony felt relieved to see Carl's stolid face in the shadows, instead of the Crawford mask. "Come on, Carl," he said again.

They slipped through alleys and backyards like a couple of large cats, until they were on the street below. There was no sense risking anyone in their own block seeing them. There was one bad moment, after they reached the avenue. The whole city suddenly seemed to explode with

sirens and bells. But it was only a fire, not cops.

Six minutes after they left the Kipp they were knocking at the door of Dixon's place, under the front stairs of a tenement house five blocks away.

Dixon lived with a big brass bed, a golden oak bureau, three chairs — one a rocker — a mirror, a towel-stand and, on the brown plaster wall, a Marilyn Monroe calendar and a color print of the wolf overlooking the distant village at twilight from a snow-capped hill. He was a man of about thirty, of medium height and compact build who escaped handsomeness by the utter lack of character in his face, the near-total absence of personality.

He let the boys in and stood back while they dumped their laundry bags on the bed. He accepted the Margo Kennett Johns envelope from Tony with a grunt. Then he rubbed short, mouse-blond hair and said, "Everything go okay?" There was a faint trace of the South in his accents.

"Yeah," said Tony. "A drunken couple came in, but they didn't see us. They went on up when they couldn't raise Smitty."

"That bastard!" Dixon said. Dixon, Tony suspected, had once come from what they called a "good" family, and he didn't like a crumb like Smitty ordering him around. How did a guy like Dixon get to be a night elevator-man in a place like the Kipp, Tony wondered.

"What do we do now?" Carl asked. Tony saw that Carl had unaccustomed rings under his eyes. Strain maybe, or maybe the single green-shaded light that dangled from the ceiling. Dixon's eyes looked circled, too.

"Be my guests," Dixon said, expansively pointing toward the bed. "We got a little wait for the payoff. Why not look over what you hauled?"

"How long we got to wait?" Tony asked. He didn't like the idea.

"Maybe half an hour, maybe longer," was the reply. "I couldn't be sure you'd make it on the dot. So what? We're okay here. Count your loot."

They got busy. It took them forty minutes. There wasn't as much cash as Tony had expected, only a little over two grand. The rest was a lot of letters and documents, like wills and deeds of sale. There was even a sheaf of uranium stock.

"Maybe we should have taken the tin boxes too," Carl said, scowling and dropping cigarette ashes on the linoleum floor covering. "That's where the rocks are."

"Yeah?" There was scorn in Dixon's soft voice. "You get a lot of hot jewelry and you got to sell it for cashew nuts. And they can trace stones. You did all right for a few minutes' work."

"What the hell, Carl!" Tony said, sheafing through a stack of crisp twenty-dollar bills. "We got over a G apiece."

"And we got a bill apiece still coming," Carl said. "When the hell do your guys get here, Dixon?"

"They'll be along," Dixon said. "How about a drink?"

"I'm dry enough," Tony said. He flipped the tiny radio on the bedside table onto an all-night disc jockey program.

"Me, too," Carl said.

"Keep that thing low," Dixon said, nodding toward the radio as he got a bottle out of the closet.

They had a drink, and then another. Tony said, "Listen, Dixon, you should've seen Carl in that Joan Crawford face. I wanted to make a date with him, he looked so good."

"You looked so great in that Hopalong puss," Carl said. He riffled the money again and the action brought a seraphic, relaxed expression to his face.

Tony glanced at his watch. The hands were creeping close to three o'clock. He said, "Your pals better get here soon, Dixon. We done our job and we want our dough. We don't figure to be around here when it gets light."

The music on the radio had been replaced by a commercial. Now the commercial was replaced by the hourly five-minute news program. The announcer said, "Burglars broke into the safe at the Hotel Kipp early this morning, shortly after a block party closed, and got away with an undisclosed amount of cash. However, in making the robbery they trussed night manager Terry Smith

with wire so tightly that he was strangled to death. Police are currently combing the block, since they suspect the robbers, from their obvious familiarity with the hotel, may have come from the neighborhood. . . ."

Dixon looked at Carl, then at Tony, and he was no longer nearly handsome. His face was old and hard and deeply set with lines and shadows. He said, "All right, which one of you did it?"

Carl was sitting on the bed, staring at the radio with his mouth half open.

Dixon slammed a fist into the palm of his other hand. He said, "Not that it makes any difference. We're all in it together, if we're caught. No wonder my contact hasn't showed up. They must have heard." He paused and his voice became soft again as he asked, "Why in hell did you have to kill him?"

"Christ, I didn't do it on purpose," Carl said.

"That's right," Tony said. "If Smitty hadn't tried to wiggle around, he'd have been all right."

"But he must have made some noise," Dixon said.

"He did," Carl said. "Tony told me to shut him up, so I gave him a kick. And he kept right on making crazy noises."

"You jerks!" Dixon said. "He was choking to death. Why didn't you loosen the wire around his neck?"

Dixon walked to the door and

back again. "You realize this means a first-degree murder rap for all of us if we're caught? All we wanted was a neat little robbery, to cover the theft of Margo Johns' papers. She had enough in that envelope to shake Jimmy Johns down for half a million clams. His people were willing to pay plenty to get the stuff."

Tony's eyes narrowed. "How much is plenty?" he asked.

Dixon snapped, "None of your business, kid. He opened his wallet, pulled out a couple of hundred-dollar bills, handed one to each of them. "I'm paying you off myself," he finished. "Now I'm gonna get you out of here."

"How?" Tony said. He was confused by the way things had gone wrong so fast. He and Carl were murderers — maybe worse, he had let Dixon play them for suckers. And now he couldn't afford to put up a fight.

"I got a car outside," Dixon said. "Picked it up last week. I'm gonna drive you to Jersey, and you can grab a bus there. Pick up your dough. We better be going."

He assembled all the litter on the bed and stuffed it into the laundry bags while Tony watched sullenly, wondering if he could make a move and what move he could make. It was like Dixon said . . . they were in it together. Still, he was glad he hadn't *done* it. Obliquely, he felt sorry for Carl.

Dixon led them outside where a

rickety sedan waited at the curb. He had a little trouble starting the engine and cursed, then said "Never knew a used car-dealer who wasn't a thief at heart. But I thought we'd better have one ready in case something happened."

"You mean you thought of it?" Carl asked, wondering. Dixon just grunted as he got the old vehicle under way.

He drove them across the George Washington Bridge and Tony looked at the great sweep of city and river and felt the copper taste of fear begin to form at the base of his tongue. He wondered what Carl was feeling — or if he was feeling anything. You just couldn't tell about Carl.

They were across the river and taking a winding byroad through some woods. Tony said, "Hey Dixon — this the way to the bus stop?"

"It's one way," Dixon said. "I'm trying to keep off the main roads. Why take any extra chances?"

"What are you gonna do?" Tony asked.

"I'm going back," said Dixon. "Hell I got to. I done my share of big time already, and I'm not craving anymore. If I took a powder they'd be on me for sure."

"They'll be on to us, not seeing me and Tony around," Carl said. "Go to Mexico," Dixon said. "You've always been belly-aching about living it up. Your time just came sooner than you expected. That's all."

The car began to buck as the

motor coughed spasmodically. Then it jerked to a halt. Dixon leaned on the wheel and said, "Of all the goddamn times for this hunk of junk to break down!" Then, more reasonably, "Know anything about motors, Tony?"

"Not me." Tony shook his head. Carl said nothing.

Dixon grunted and got out. He went forward and lifted the hood and vanished behind its oddly threatening shape as it cut off the lower sky. On either side of them were woods. All Tony could hear for a moment was the sound of frogs croaking away in some unseen, nearby pond.

It was the silence that cued his flash of understanding. Dixon should have made some noise out there. But he didn't. And all at once, Tony knew what was going to happen. Dixon was going to kill him, kill them both. There was no other answer.

What difference did it make to him whether they were caught in New York or somewhere else? Once the cops had them, they had Dixon, too, and on a murder rap. He couldn't afford the risk.

Why drive them way out here? And why have the car break down in a lonely spot like this? Only one answer fitted all the questions that raced through Tony's mind. He was dead, Carl was dead. He was about to move himself, but Carl already was moving, fast, soft, cat-like.

If Dixon had faked it with the clutch — Tony knew *that* much — the car would still go. Carl was behind the wheel now and Tony felt tight and scared inside. He figured they had maybe two-three seconds.

The ignition on. The motor responded. In gear the old car lurched forward, struck something, lurched forward again. Tony thought he heard a faint, desperate cry.

"Come on," Carl said, scrambling out of the car. Dixon was lying half underneath it, on his back. A corner of the headlight must have caught him leaning forward. The whole top of his head was a bloody mess. And the front tire had run over his neck, breaking it so that his head lay almost side-ways along his left shoulder.

"*Kee-rist!*" Carl said. "You killed him," Tony said, inanely feeling sick to his stomach. They had found the gun, about five feet back, where Dixon had dropped it. A Remington .32 automatic. Carl handed Tony the gun. The safety catch was off. He took out the magazine, then drew back the barrel casing, shook the cartridge out of the chamber, returned it to the magazine and put the magazine back in the handle. "He was ready to give it to both of us," Carl said.

Tony nodded, realizing that some sixth sense of self-preservation had sent his stolid companion into spontaneous action.

"What do we do now?" Carl's

mouth and eyes were round in the moonlight. He looked about ready to burst into tears.

"Get his wallet, and the Johns' envelope," Tony said.

They bent to the task.

"What now," Carl asked again.

"We walk," said Tony. He had a new plan to meet the new conditions. If they kept heading west, they'd hit the highway. There they could pick up a hitch to the nearest bus-stop, and be on their way to the border. No one, at least for a long long time, would connect them with the car in the woods and the body beneath it. They'd know someone had murdered Dixon — but they'd pin the Kipp robbery and Smitty's murder on him. Which, Tony felt, was only fair.

Meanwhile, he and Carl had the Johns envelope. They had Dixon's wallet, with whatever clues it held to the million-dollar contact. They could make a deal by themselves. Visions of fifty-buck racetrack windows and hundred-buck women danced in his head. He and old Carl would never have to worry about money again.

They made the highway in seventeen minutes, got a lift on a truck in eleven more. They had breakfast in a Newark cafeteria and were heading south, in a Greyhound, at a little after eight o'clock. The morning was sunny, the bus was warm and comfortable, its motion and reaction made them sleepy . . .

Tony woke up first. The brief

panic of not knowing where he was was followed by a sense of well-being. He looked at Carl, snoring softly on the aisle seat, his mouth half-open as usual. He debated waking him up, decided to let him sleep a while longer. Tony lolled in his own well being, the deep inner satisfaction of knowing that no matter how you cut it *his* hands were not blood-stained. A sigh escaped from him.

The seat in front of them was empty, but Tony could see a tabloid folded and wedged in between the seat and the side of the big vehicle. He pulled it out and opened it up. The story was front-page headlines, along with a picture of blonde Margo Kennett Johns, clutching a mink coat over a nightgown.

The caption said — "*I've been robbed of papers worth at least \$1,000,000.*" There was more, of course, and more inside on page three. It was mostly about the murder of Smitty. Tony noted that Smitty's full name had been Jerome Lionel Smith. Jerome Lionel — what a name for a night manager making, maybe, sixty bucks a week, he thought.

But the paper didn't have much else. It was too soon for the full treatment, even if the cops were talking.

He got out Dixon's wallet. There were seven hundred-dollar bills in it, along with forty-seven in smalls. Taking off the hundred apiece Dixon had given Carl and himself, Tony

figured he must have collected a grand in advance. He began to whistle softly to himself as he went through the cards in the wallet, seeking some trace of the Johns contact.

Some of his sense of well-being faded when he failed to find a trace of it. There were plenty of cards, with plenty of phone numbers scribbled on the back. First names, street addresses, phone numbers. None of them meant a thing.

He stuffed the money in his own pocket and got out the Johns envelope he'd taken from the safe. There were letters, letters so hot they made him gulp, and dozens of strips of film. He held one of them up against the window. It reminded him graphically of the obscene movies he had once seen at a stag smoker.

No wonder, he thought, Jimmy Johns and his lawyers were willing to pay anything, to do anything, to get them back. He wondered how big a price he could set when he got in touch with them. Or they got in touch with him.

Or they got in touch with him! The cops might give up in time, be satisfied with what they had — Dixon's body and most of the loot from the safe, back in the car. But Jimmy Johns' men would never quit. They couldn't. And once they'd found who had the evidence, it would be a lot cheaper and neater simply to arrange a rubout.

With sickening clarity, Tony saw

that he should have left the Margo Kennett Johns envelope with Dixon's body. If police had found them, that would have been that. But the fact they weren't found would put Johns and his agents after them — and they'd never stop until they either had the papers or knew they were destroyed.

Destroy them — that was it. Burn the damned things. But how to prove to Johns' operatives, when they caught up with them, that he *had* destroyed them, that he hadn't had copies or photostats made?

It wasn't going to work. No matter what he did, they'd be coming after Carl and himself. They were probably after them already. They'd question Dixon's landlady, his neighbors, Mrs. Fiametto. They'd pretend to be working with the police. They'd *use* the police. And when they had the information they wanted, they'd strike — anywhere.

Two kids — one named Carl, the other Tony. They'd have descriptions, sooner or later they'd find them. Two kids — one named Carl, the other Tony.

Tony noticed a big low sports convertible that was hovering on the flank of the bus, clinging there for maybe a couple of miles. He caught the flash of sunlight on the twin circles of the driver's sunglasses as he looked up at the bus windows. Involuntarily, he cringed back in his seat. How could he be sure they weren't on the trail already.

When he looked again, covertly, the convertible was pulling on ahead. Using his forearm, he mopped sudden sweat from his face. Two kids — one named Carl, the other Tony.

They wouldn't be looking for one kid named Tony. Especially if his name was something else. He had over two grand in his kick, and the sleeping Carl had more than an-

other. With over three Gs, a guy could go a long way — by himself.

The pistol, the real pistol, he had picked up near Dixon's body, tugged heavily at his hip pocket. Tony was grateful it wasn't a still heavier, bulkier forty-five. He looked at Carl, listened to his gentle snoring.

He wondered how it was going to be. He had never been alone, really alone, in his life.



Weekend Spree

In Owensboro, Ky., state police arrested a 15-year-old boy after a two day crime wave. They accused the boy of breaking into six cars, stealing three, and wrecking two of them after two wild police chases. The boy was home on a visit from the Kentucky Village Juvenile Detention Home. Officials at the home said they had given the boy a weekend leave as a reward for good conduct.

Honey Hideout

Jose Hernandez, of Mexico City, was recently arrested for cattle rustling. Authorities said a neighbor's missing cow was found hidden in Hernandez' one-room flat.

Cake Eater

Mrs. Golda Knuth, of Council Bluffs, Iowa, reported the burglary of her cafe to police. Nothing had been taken with the exception of a large bite out of an angel food cake left on the counter.

One Of Those Days

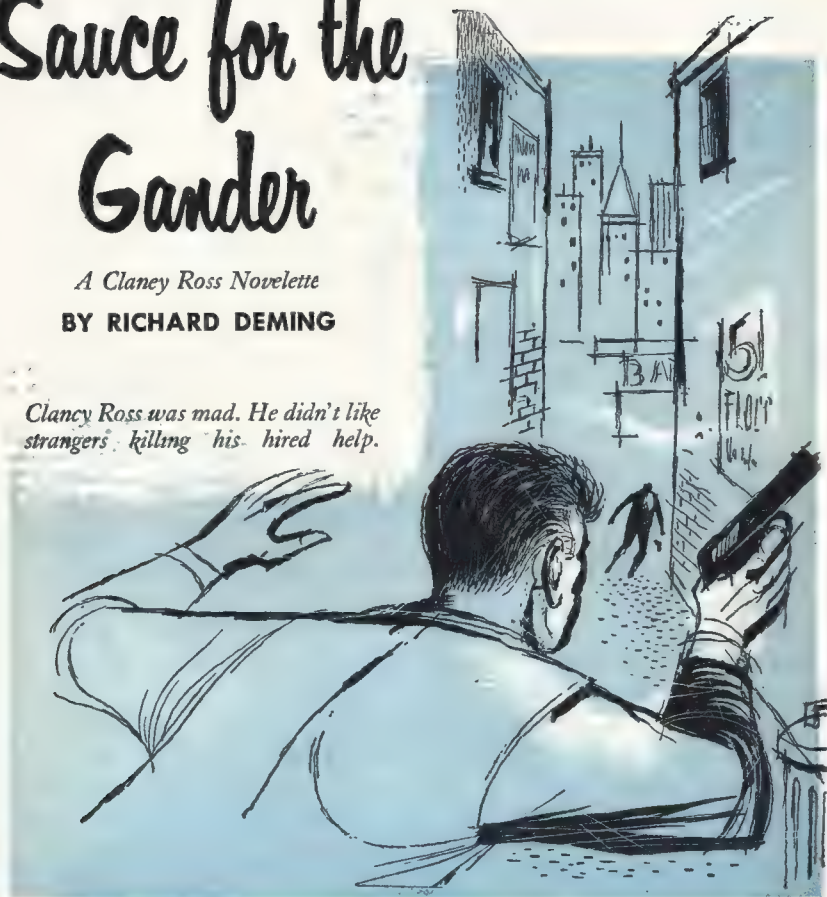
Robert E. Schallert, 35, Houston, Tex., police department accident investigator, was given a three-day suspension recently. Police Chief Jack Heard explained that the officer backed a patrol car into a park bench while on an accident call, stripped the gears on another car, drove a third to the station with a boiling radiator and bent the fender on a fourth car.

Sauce for the Gander

A Clancy Ross Novelette

BY RICHARD DEMING

Clancy Ross was mad. He didn't like strangers killing his hired help.



EXCEPT that his right earlobe was missing, there was nothing arresting about the tall, sunburned man until you looked closely. He was as quiet-mannered and as sleekly-dressed as any patron of Club Rotunda.

But Sam Black, the club's assistant

manager, made a habit of looking closely at every new customer. This one, he decided after only momentary study, was carrying a gun under his arm.

The man told Black that his name was Larry Eaton, that Judge Bernard had said to mention his name

and he'd like to go upstairs to the gaming rooms. The assistant manager furrowed his forehead as though searching his mind for a Judge Bernard. He shook his head regretfully.

"Afraid I don't know the judge," he said. "Anyway, there's nothing upstairs but Mr. Ross's apartment." He glanced across the room at Oscar the headwaiter, who wasn't even looking his way. "Excuse me, Mr. Eaton. The headwaiter's signalling me about something. Nice to have met you."

As Black walked away, the sunburned man shrugged and moved toward the bar.

Beneath the deliberate stupidity of Sam Black's expression was a lightning-quick mind. His snap decision to brush off the man who said his name was Larry Eaton was actually the result of careful consideration, even though the thought process took only seconds.

A dozen times nightly the stocky assistant manager had to decide whether or not to allow first-time visitors to the club upstairs to the casino. And what had brought about his decision in this case was recognition of a type. Though he had never before seen the sunburned man, nor heard the name Larry Eaton, instinct warned him this was a high-caliber hood. Possibly the man was merely out for a good time. But also, possibly he was gunning for someone.

At the end of a half hour Larry

Eaton decided to leave. At the archway giving off the foyer where the cloakrooms were, he paused to glance reflectively at the mirrored elevator doors across the room.

At that moment they opened and a thin, slightly stoop-shouldered man wearing horn-rimmed glasses and carrying a brief case stepped from the car. Black recognized Benny Stoneman, the club bookkeeper, and shifted his gaze back toward Eaton again.

During the part of a second the assistant manager's gaze had been settled on the elevator, the sunburned man had disappeared through the front door.

The bookkeeper went out the front door also. Black shrugged and turned to wander back among the tables. He had barely taken three steps when a rapid series of shots sounded from immediately in front of the club.

Black was racing forward before the last shot stopped echoing. One hand thrust the glass door outward while the other drew a short-barreled revolver from beneath his arm. He landed in the center of the sidewalk in a crouch, his gaze sweeping the surrounding area in one quick but thorough glance before settling on the crumpled figure lying on the concrete just outside the door.

There was not a pedestrian in sight and the only vehicle in motion was a block away. Black caught only a glimpse of twin taillights before it turned the corner and disappeared.

Sheathing his gun, he knelt next to the crumpled figure.

"You hurt bad, Benny?" he asked.

The thin bookkeeper didn't answer. He was beyond answering.

2.

Except for a brief phone conversation with Clancy Ross upstairs, Sam Black didn't have a chance to talk to the club proprietor before the police arrived. He was too busy quieting the downstairs customers and Ross was too busy closing the casino and herding the gambling customers downstairs to tables in the night-club portion of the building.

Nor did he have a chance to make a report to Ross after they arrived, since Lieutenant Niles Redfern, who was in charge of the investigation, kept the gambler at his side while he supervised the photographing of the body, finally released it to the morgue wagon, and satisfied himself that the only witness who knew anything at all was Sam Black.

Detective Lieutenant Niles Redfern was a lanky, middle-aged man with a lean intelligent face and a perpetually morose expression. He was a dedicated law officer and an efficient one, but he had one defect which prevented his rise beyond a lieutenantcy in a police department run the way St. Stephen's was.

Unfortunately for his career, he was incorruptible.

His assistant this evening was Sergeant James Morton, a thick-bodied unimaginative man who also would probably never earn further promotion. But not for the same reason, for Morton had no compunction about accepting graft, and was one of the police on the Rotunda's payroll. He remained a sergeant because even in a corrupt police department there have to be minimum standards of ability.

Oddly, Clancy Ross liked Niles Redfern who would have closed down the club with pleasure if he ever got the opportunity, and had nothing but contempt for police who accepted payoff.

When the last of the club patrons had been allowed to go home after having their names and addresses recorded by Sergeant Morton, the four men took seats at the bar, Ross and Sam Black in the center, and the two detectives flanking them.

"Drink?" the gambler offered.

Sergeant Morton looked expectant, but his expression faded when the lieutenant shook his head.

"Tell me about this Benny Stone-man," Redfern said. "How long's he worked here?"

Clancy Ross's eyebrows, a startling black in contrast to the uniform silver of his prematurely gray hair, hunched together thoughtfully. He fingered the thin scar which formed the slight cleft in his chin.

"Around a month," he said finally. "Maybe five weeks." He looked at Sam Black for confirmation.

"Four weeks and three days," Black said.

"He was your bookkeeper?" the lieutenant asked Ross.

The gambler nodded.

"How'd he happen to be working so late? Don't night-club bookkeepers work nine to five just like office bookkeepers?"

"The payroll," Sam Black answered for Ross. "Tomorrow's the fifteenth."

The lieutenant's gaze shifted to Black. "You were the first one outside after it happened, Sam? And nobody was in sight?"

"Not immediately. A car was just wheeling around the next corner, but it was too dark to catch the number and make. About two minutes later the street was full, though. The shots emptied every building in the neighborhood except ours. I blocked the front door, told the customers to get back to their tables, then put guards on both the front and side doors to make sure nobody left."

"Quick thinking," Redfern commended. "Made it a lot easier for us. Ross, where'd this Stoneman come from before you hired him?"

"Chicago."

"Oh? Know his antecedents?"

"I checked references before I hired him."

"And?"

"Nothing in his past record suggested he was hot. At the time."

The lieutenant asked on a rising note, "At the time?"

"He kept books for Big John Quinnel before coming here," the gambler said briefly.

The lieutenant's eyes narrowed. "Quinnel. Isn't he syndicate stuff?"

"He's just been indicted for income-tax evasion," Ross said. "I remember wondering when I read it the other day if Uncle Sam would be dragging my bookkeeper off to Chicago to testify, and leave me in a hole."

The lieutenant digested this. "You think Quinnel might have had the guy bumped just because he was a potential witness against him in a tax case? Seems a little raw even for the syndicate."

"What's this Quinnel look like?" Sam Black asked suddenly.

All three of the others looked at him.

"Why?" Redfern asked. "Think you might have seen him hanging around here?"

Black shrugged. "I wouldn't know unless you told me what he looked like. I see hundreds of people hanging around here."

Ross said, "I've never met the man."

The lieutenant shrugged in indication that he hadn't either, but Sergeant Morton said unexpectedly, "He's about six-four and weighs around two-fifty. That's why they call him Big John."

It was the sergeant's turn to be looked at.

"He's staying over at the Park Plaza," Morton said.

Lieutenant Redfern scowled at his assistant. "He's actually in town? You've seen him?"

"Sure. He's down here on vacation. Been here all week. Somebody pointed him out to me the other night."

The lieutenant's scowl deepened. "It occur to you the department might be interested in learning that a known out-of-town hood is visiting here?"

Morton looked surprised, indicating that it hadn't. The lieutenant dropped the subject as hopeless.

"Know anything about Stoneman's private life?" he asked Ross.

The gambler said he knew the man had been married, but had never met his wife. "He did show me her picture. Quite a dish for a guy like Benny. Looked about half his age. They lived over on East Stoyale somewhere."

He looked at Sam Black, who said, "Seven thirty-four."

The lieutenant made a note of the address.

"One more thing, Ross," he said, rising. "Knowing you, I suppose you'll feel impelled to prove to whoever bumped Stoneman that it's not healthy to knock off your employees. If you do any prying on your own and learn who gunned Stoneman, I'm warning you right now that the law has first call. Try taking matters into your own hands, and I'll run you down as fast as I would any killer."

Ross grinned at him. "When did

I ever take the law into my own hands, Lieutenant?"

When the two detectives had departed, Sam Black said, "Now you ready to listen to my report?"

Ross said, "Go ahead."

"A tall guy about thirty years old came in at eight. Had a brand new sunburn, a missing right earlobe, wore a two-hundred-dollar suit and a gun. He wanted upstairs, but I gave him the brush on general principles. He was looking for somebody, but he didn't find him. He left just as Benny got off the elevator, and I'm pretty sure he spotted him getting off. He walked out not fifteen seconds ahead of Benny."

Ross thought this over. "He fit Morton's description of Big John Quinnel?"

"Not by three inches and sixty pounds. But hoods in Quinnel's economic bracket don't do their own gunning, do they?"

"Not likely. Maybe you'd better check up on Quinnel to see if your friend's one of his gunnies."

"Not me," Black said. "I just quit."

Ross's eyebrows raised.

"This Quinnel is syndicate stuff," Black explained. "But you haven't got any sense. You'll breeze in and start pushing him around just like you push around local hoods who step on your toes. You've got to be independent. You won't tie in with Bix Lawson so we'd have an army of goons behind us. You'd rather pay three times as much protection

and be on your own. Just so you don't have to take orders from anybody. So what's it get us? It leaves me and you all alone when the syndicate gets sore and decides to blow up the club. I'll send you a card from Cuba."

Ross glanced at his wristwatch. "Ten-thirty," he said, completely ignoring his assistant's outburst. "There's still time to get started tonight. Morton said Quinzel's staying at the Park Plaza. Get on over there and see what you can dig up."

3.

It was two A.M. before Sam Black returned from his mission. He found Clancy Ross still awake in the front room of his apartment, which was on the third floor of the club.

Black said gloomily, "Big John's been in town five days. Probably just vacationing, because he hasn't had any conferences with local shots insofar as I could learn. Bix Lawson lives at the Park Plaza too, you know, but he hasn't been to Quinzel's suite or Quinzel to his, though they've had a few drinks together in the bar. The only visitors to Quinzel's suite have been a succession of dolls. Usually in groups of three. Quinzel brought two bodyguards with him, and they're all shackled up together in the same suite. It cost me twenty bucks to the bell captain to pry that much out. You can add it to my next pay check if either of us live till next payday."

"See either of the two bodyguards?" Ross asked.

Black shook his head. "The bell captain told me a party had been going on in the suite since noon. Usual intimate size. Big John, the two bodyguards and three babes. Lieutenant Redfern and Sergeant Morton interrupted it for a time shortly before I got there, but were only upstairs about fifteen minutes. And nobody stirred out of the suite while I was there."

Ross frowned at him. "Didn't you ask the bell captain for descriptions of the two bodyguards?"

"Yeah, sure," Black said reluctantly, and when Ross merely waited with patience, added in a resigned voice, "One of them is pale and skinny and answers to the name of Bugsy. But he's registered as Earl Windt. The other is a tall, sunburned guy with a missing right earlobe. But his name's not Larry Eaton. It's Larry Horton. Probably a coincidence. There must be hundreds of tall, sunburned guys with missing earlobes."

"No doubt," Ross said, smiling slightly.

But there was no humor in the smile. It struck his assistant as anticipatory, and Black was afraid he knew what the gambler was anticipating.

"Listen," Black said. "Benny was a nice guy. I liked him. But he was only here a month and he wasn't much more than an acquaintance to either of us. If somebody bumped

me, or Oscar the headwaiter, or one of the old-time housemen, I'd expect you to get mad. I'd get mad myself. But this is silly. Quinnel's only got two guns with him, but just by lifting a phone he could probably have a hundred more in town within hours. We can't fight a whole syndicate."

Rising, Ross switched off the TV set. "Might as well get some sleep," he said mildly. "Probably have a tough day tomorrow."

"Oh, the hell with it," Black said. "You've got a head like a brick. See you in the morning."

By "morning" Black actually meant the next afternoon, as Club Rotunda didn't open till four P.M., and the assistant manager customarily arrived only an hour beforehand. He had finished his usual check of the kitchen, bar and dining room before Clancy Ross came downstairs at a quarter of four.

When the gambler announced that he was going out and didn't know when he'd be back, Sam Black went to the cloakroom and returned with his hat.

"I won't need you," Ross said.

"The hell you won't," Black told him. "If you insist on committing suicide, I want to be around to claim your body."

"I'm only going down to police headquarters."

"I'll still go along. Maybe I'll apply for a job on the force. Even big-time racketeers like Quinnel think twice before they bump cops."

Lieutenant Niles Redfern was working the four to midnight trick and had just arrived at his office when Ross and Black walked in. He told them that the lab report on Benny Stoneman showed five thirty-eight-caliber bullets in the stomach, all spaced so closely together a palm could cover them.

Ross asked, "Get anything from Quinnel?"

"I talked to him," Redfern said. "He, two other guys and three women were having a party in his suite. They all swore it had started the previous noon and none of them had been out of the suite since. Which gave everybody alibis."

Neither Ross nor Black made any comment.

Lieutenant Redfern said he had also talked to the murdered bookkeeper's widow, who was as beautiful as Ross had indicated. As a routine check the lieutenant had asked for an accounting of her movements, and her only alibi was that she had been home alone all evening.

The gambler asked, "Any suggestions from her about who might have gunned Benny?"

"One," Redfern answered laconically. "She says he had a mistress."

Both Ross and Black looked surprised. "Benny?" Black asked incredulously. "A dream of a wife *and* a mistress? Why the guy was at least forty-five and looked like Ichabod Crane."

"He must have had something," Redfern said. "His wife doesn't know who the mistress was, but she's sure he had one. From little bits of evidence like lipstick on handkerchiefs, always the same shade, and blonde hairs on his coat lapel. The wife's a brunette."

As this seemed to be all the information the lieutenant had, Ross and Black left. Outside, Black climbed into the right-hand seat of Ross's Lincoln and watched with a scowl as his employer started the car.

5.

As they crossed the lobby of the Park Plaza toward the elevators, Ross and Black spotted two men and a woman coming from the bar. Both the men were huge without being fat. One, a stranger to Ross, was at least six feet four, with thick shoulders and a broad chest. He had a square, strong-jawed face with a blue-black chin, hairy eyebrows and thick, oily black hair.

The other man, nearly as tall and thick-chested, was Bix Lawson, local political boss and ruler of most of St. Stephen's rackets. The woman, a sizzling brunette in her late twenties, looked vaguely familiar to Ross, but he couldn't quite place her.

"Think that man with Lawson might be Quinnel?" he asked Black.

Black looked that way and shrugged. Just then a thin, pale-

faced man who had come from the barroom a step or two ahead of the others and had paused to give the lobby a quick onceover, circled the group and placed himself protectively at the tallest man's rear.

"It must be Quinnel," Ross decided. "Paleface answers the description you got of his bodyguard Bugsy."

"I guess," Black said without enthusiasm.

They watched as the quartet crossed the lobby toward the main entrance to the hotel. When Ross made no move to intercept them, Black looked at him questioningly.

"It's the other bodyguard I want to talk to," Ross said. "Since Bugsy seems to be on duty, maybe he's still up in Quinnel's suite. If Quinnel and Bugsy take off somewhere, it will give us a clear field."

Bix Lawson separated from the others at the door after bowing to the woman and giving his huge friend a comradely slap on the shoulder. He started back toward the bar while the others went on out, the pale bodyguard going first.

Ross moved on toward the elevators and Sam Black gloomily trailed him.

As Ross had hoped, they found the second bodyguard alone in suite seven-o-seven. The man with the missing earlobe looked a little startled when he saw Sam Black, then shifted his gaze to Clancy Ross.

"I'm Clancy Ross," the gambler told him. "You've met Sam Black

and know he could blow your alibi for last night higher than a space ship. Let's have some conversation."

The sunburned man considered things only a moment before stepping aside and holding the door wide open. Ross and Black walked into a large room furnished with a sofa, several easy chairs, a television set and a small portable bar. Other rooms gave off it on either side.

Ross selected an easy chair, sank into it and lit a cigarette. Black dropped his hat on an end table and seated himself in the center of the sofa. The sunburned man remained standing, his back to the door.

"Is your real name Eaton or Horton?" Ross asked.

"Horton. What do you want?"

"Just some conversation. You walked out of my club just before my bookkeeper was gunned down last night. You either did it yourself or saw it done. I dropped by to find out which."

Horton gazed at the gambler expressionlessly for a long time before saying, "You guys didn't say anything to the cops about my being at the club, did you?"

"What makes you sure of that?"

"The boss checked up. On you, I mean, not with the cops. You wouldn't spill to the cops because you like to wash your own laundry."

Ross gave him a bright smile. "Since you know how I operate, we can save a lot of explanation. I imagine you deny gunning Stoneman yourself."

The sunburned man's lips formed a cynical grin. "You imagine right, mister. Isn't that a sort of dumb question?"

"Because you'd give the same answer even if you had killed him? I don't think so. As I said before, either you killed him or saw it done. You walked out too closely ahead of the shooting to be more than yards from the entrance when it happened. Since you claim you didn't kill the man, you must have seen who did. All you have to do to convince me you're innocent is give me a description of the real killer."

The bodyguard snorted. "I don't know a thing, mister. I was gone before the shooting started."

Ross shook his head. "I don't think you understand," he said patiently. "You *had* to see the shooting if you didn't do it yourself. If you can't describe the killer, I'll have to assume you're it. I don't think you'd like that."

Horton's face abruptly lost all expression. "Is that a threat?"

"Of course," Ross said easily. "Were you people under the impression you could walk into town and start bumping off my employees without risking a hearse ride back to Chicago?"

After staring at Ross in astonishment, the bodyguard emitted a deliberately humorless laugh. "Who you think you're talking to, buster? We know all about you. You're an independent. You've got no backing from Bix Lawson, and Bix

wouldn't lift a hand to help you out of a jam. Matter of fact, I think he'd be pleased to see you go down. You better scram out of here before I get mad. And don't come back."

He started to pull the door open as Ross punched out his cigarette and came to his feet. With a resigned expression on his face, Sam Black folded hands in his lap and leaned back comfortably.

Walking over to the door, Ross pushed it shut again with one hand and casually gave Horton a back-hand slap with the other.

With a grunt of anger the bodyguard lashed out with a left hook. Easily the gambler deflected it with his right palm, whooshed the air from the man by sinking his left into his stomach, then grabbed him by the hair and jerked his head downward at the same time he brought up a knee. When the gambler flung him back to smash against the wall, blood spurted from both Horton's nostrils.

Without giving the man time to recover, Ross grabbed his necktie with one hand, put the other behind his head and hurled him halfway across the room to crash headfirst into an easy chair. When Horton fumbled at his armpit and groggily tried to scramble back to his feet, Ross's open palm caught him full across the mouth, knocking him back to a seated position. The man made no further attempt to reach for a gun.

Fastidiously the gambler wiped

his bloodied palm on the bodyguard's shoulder. "Now how about that description?"

Horton glared up at him with hate, his jaws clenched. Unemotionally the gambler slapped him twice more, full swings which jolted the sunburned man's head first one way and then the other, spattering droplets of blood in either direction.

Ross waited inquiringly for a moment, when the man still showed no inclination to speak, cocked his right fist and reached for a handhold in his hair.

"Hold it," the bodyguard said thickly. "It was a woman."

Ross let his hands drop to his sides. "Know her?"

Horton shook his head, his expression enraged but wary. Ross waited while he pulled a handkerchief from his breast pocket and sopped up some of the blood flowing from his nose.

"It was dark out and I only glanced at her once," Horton mumbled through the handkerchief. "I don't even remember if she was a blonde or brunette. She was maybe in her late twenties, not bad looking, but I couldn't give any more description than that if you beat me all night. She was double-parked in a blue sedan. A Ford, I think, though maybe not. All these new cars look alike to me. My car was at the curb right behind her. I got in, waited for her to move so I could drive out, and then this guy came out of the club. She leaned over to the righthand

window, let him have it and drove away. I scrambled after her."

"Catch the license?"

The man shook his head. "I didn't want any part of it."

"Now," Ross said, "we come to the jackpot question. What were you doing at the club last night?"

"Just looking for a good time."

Ross shook his head. "You were hunting for someone. Who?"

Horton looked up at him and Ross let his china-blue eyes grow opaque. The bodyguard estimated his chance of getting away with sticking to the story that he had merely been out for a good time, decided he didn't have any.

"Benny Stoneman," he said sullenly.

"Oh? Why?"

"Don't you read the papers? The boss is in line for an income-tax rap. Stoneman used to be his bookkeeper. Big John wanted me to talk to him to make sure he said the right things if he was ever called to testify. He didn't want to look him up personally, because if the Feds ever got wind of a contact between him and Benny, they'd probably yammer about coercion. You know how it is."

"No, I don't," Ross said. "I pay my income tax. So why didn't you just ask for Benny?"

"Because if the Feds ever checked to see if he'd been got to, it would look bad if they turned up that somebody from the organization had been inquiring around for him. Big

John told me to make it look like an accidental meeting."

After consideration Ross decided the story was logical. Though Horton hadn't mentioned it, obviously a death threat would have accompanied the instructions to the bookkeeper to "say the right things," and just as obviously Big John Quinnel wouldn't want anyone other than Stoneman to know there had been a contact.

"I guess that's all for the moment," the gambler decided. "If I think of any more questions, I'll be back."

6.

As it was now near the dinner hour, Ross dropped Sam Black off at the club to attend to business, and made his next call alone.

Seven thirty-four East Stoyale was a neat one-story frame cottage in a middle-class residential district. A woman of about twenty-eight came to the door.

She was a brunette, dark and torrid-looking in a skin-tight black dress which no one could have guessed was supposed to signify mourning, for it outlined every curve of her finely-developed body. A rather full lower lip, an attractive but slightly flat nose and dark eyes which seemed to slant a trifle upward gave her a slight oriental flavor.

Ross was startled when he saw her, but it didn't show in his face. Now he knew why the woman he had seen

with Quinnel had looked vaguely familiar. Benny Stoneman had once showed him his wife's picture.

"Mrs. Stoneman?" Ross asked.

"Yes."

"I'm Clancy Ross."

"Oh," she said. "Come in."

She led him into a small but well-furnished front room and asked him to sit. After a standard expression of sympathy from Ross and an equally standard expression of thanks from the woman, she examined him with bright interest.

"Benny spoke of you a lot," she said. "He had a good deal of admiration for you."

"I liked Benny too. Which is one of the reasons I'm here."

She looked a question and the gambler explained, "This isn't entirely a sympathy call. I'm playing cop. Trying to run down Benny's killer."

"Oh? Well, I'm afraid I told the police everything I knew."

"I know. But maybe if we kicked it around a while, you'd remember something you didn't tell them. A clue to the identity of this mistress you think he had, for instance."

She flushed slightly. "I see you've been talking to the police."

"Some. Had dinner yet?"

She shook her head. "We . . . I usually eat about seven."

"Then suppose you have it with me. We can talk while we're eating."

"In public?" she asked. "With my husband dead less than twenty-four hours? Oh, I couldn't."

The objection struck Ross as more a sop to convention than a symptom of grief. As a matter of fact, he couldn't detect any grief in the woman.

"We'll pick a quiet place where you won't be known," he said.

She considered. "You think it would be all right? Maybe your being Benny's employer and all . . ."

"It will be all right," he assured her.

He took her to Romaine's, where the only illumination was candlelight and the clientele was small but select. He learned her first name was Helene, and before dinner was over he was calling her Helene and she was calling him Clancy.

After dinner Ross ordered drinks, and it developed that Helene Stoneman had an affinity for double bourbons and soda. As Ross drank only his usual weak scotch and water, by ten P.M., when they finally left Romaine's, Ross was still dead sober, but Helene Stoneman was hilariously drunk.

By now she had completely forgotten her widowhood. As soon as they were seated in the Lincoln, she leaned against him, gave him a moist kiss on the cheek and then nestled her head on his shoulder.

When they reached her home, he had to help her from the car. Though he steadied her with one hand gripped to her bicep, she staggered all over the walk on the way to the front porch. Leaning her against the door, he took her purse and searched

it for her key. He gripped her bicep again when he opened the door, to prevent her falling inward with it.

The gambler was a little irked with himself for letting her get so drunk. When he had discovered her liking for bourbon, he had deliberately shelved talking about her husband's murder in the hope that he could first loosen her tongue with alcohol. But in her present state it was unlikely he could get any sense out of her at all.

Leading her into the front room, he switched on a lamp and steered her toward the sofa. But instead of sitting, she suddenly spun against him, threw her arms about his neck and dragged his mouth down to hers.

He found it wide open.

For the next few moments Ross merely hung on while the woman's body undulated against his and her mouth greedily worked at his lips. Finally he forcibly broke the kiss and held her away by the shoulders. She fought his grip, attempting to struggle back into his arms.

"Hold it, Helene," he said. "I'll play with you when you're sober, but I don't take advantage of drunken women."

"I am sober," she said in a strained voice. "That sobered me like a jolt of electricity."

Looking down at her, he realized with astonishment that she was telling the truth. Only moments before she had hardly been able to stand, but she had sobered as abruptly as

she had managed to get drunk.

"Don't just stand there looking at me!" she said. "For God's sake, kiss me!"

And flinging his detaining grip from her shoulders with an outward movement of her hands, she was back at him like a wildcat, twining her arms about his neck and moving her body passionately against his. Ross made another halfhearted attempt to disengage himself, but her almost animal abandon was too much for him.

Giving up the fight, he grabbed her as roughly as she was grabbing at him and threw her onto the couch.

7.

Later, as they sat side-by-side on the sofa quietly smoking cigarettes, Helene seemed impelled to offer some explanation for her startling performance.

"I'm not a nympho, Clancy," she said in a subdued and entirely sober tone. "But you don't know how long I've been pent up. Benny and I . . . well, there just wasn't anything there any more. I knew he had another woman, so I wouldn't . . ." She let it trail off. "Did you expect the evening to end like this?"

"It got a little off the track," Ross admitted. "All I planned was a bit of discussion about Benny."

"Do we have to talk about him?"

He looked down at the top of her head. "Don't you want your husband's killer caught?"

She shifted a little uncomfortably. "Well, yes, I suppose. But you must know I wasn't in love with him."

Ross asked casually, "What were you doing with Big John Quinell this afternoon?"

Straightening up, she looked at him. "What?"

He repeated the question, then added, "I happened to see you together at the Park Plaza. At the time I didn't know who you were."

Helene frowned. "Why did you wait so long to ask me?"

Ross shrugged. "Maybe I didn't think it was important. Is it?"

The question made her pause. "Of course not," she said finally. "Big John was Benny's employer in Chicago, you know, so I got to know him quite well. When he saw about Benny's death in the paper, he phoned to offer sympathy. Then he asked me to drop by the hotel because he wanted to talk to me. I met him in the bar for one drink. All he wanted was to know if I needed help. Money help, he meant. I said no and he brought me home."

Ross said nothing for a few moments. Then he asked, "Have you gone through Benny's things yet? Papers and so on?"

She shook her head. "I'm supposed to tomorrow morning. With a Lieutenant Redfern. He thinks maybe he can find a clue to the identity of Benny's mistress. Though what good that will do him, I don't know."

"It might solve the case," Ross

told her. "A witness who saw the shooting claims a woman did it."

"Oh? Do the police have a description?"

"The police don't even have the witness. I dug him up. Anyway, about the only description he could give was that she was female. Incidentally, what kind of car do you drive?"

"A blue Ford sedan. Why?"

"Nothing. Just checking."

She frowned at him. "What kind of car did this witness see?" she demanded.

"A black coupe," he lied in an easy voice.

Her lower lip stuck out petulantly. "I don't think that was a very nice question to ask."

"I'm not a very nice guy," Ross conceded cheerfully. "Do me a favor tomorrow, will you?"

"What?"

"If you and the lieutenant turn up the name of Benny's mistress when you go through his papers, phone it to me."

"All right," she said. "If you're looking for a woman suspect, I'd just as soon you'd look away from me."

8.

It was nearly midnight when Ross pulled into his reserved place in the parking lot behind Club Rotunda.

The lot was on the opposite side of the alley from the club and in the center of the block. Club patrons

had to walk approximately a hundred feet to the alley mouth, turn right and walk half the length of the building to the side entrance. Clancy Ross, having a key to the alley door leading from the club kitchen, had to walk only half that distance.

Even before he caught the glint of light on metal, Ross sensed a shadowy figure crouched in the alley. Instantly he dropped flat, his right hand darting beneath his left arm as he fell. A streak of fire probed out above his prone body, the sharp crack of the pistol echoing from the building walls a micro-second later.

So close behind the first shot that it seemed a continuation of the sound, his own .38 automatic roared. With a pained grunt the figure in the areaway slammed backward, caromed from one of the brick walls and tumbled to the ground.

The gambler was up as instantly as he had dropped, his gun pointed at the downed man and ready to fire again at the slightest movement. The man lay on his back; but the areaway was too dark to make out his face. The gleam of metal on the ground several feet away told Ross he had dropped his gun.

The downed man emitted a single low moan, then began to make a bubbling noise which brought a grimace to the gambler's face. Stepping back from the areaway, Ross glanced both ways along the alley.

At that time of night the two office buildings were deserted, and no one on the streets seemed to have

noticed the shots. After listening for a moment Ross returned to the areaway. The man hadn't moved his position and the bubbling noise had stopped.

Sheathing his gun, Ross flicked on his lighter and held it to the dead face. It was the thin pale bodyguard he had seen with Big John Quinzel, the man registered at the hotel as Earl Windt, but more familiarly known as Bugsy.

Leaving him there, Ross crossed to the club's rear door and let himself into the kitchen. He found Sam Black in the downstairs club.

"Got a job for you," he told the assistant manager. "Quinzel's boy, Bugsy, just took a shot at me as I walked up the alley."

Black frowned. "I told you so, Clancy. What'd you expect, pushing around an employee of a guy like Quinzel. He missed this time, but . . ." He paused to give Ross closer examination. "He did miss, didn't he?"

"He missed. He's lying in the areaway between the two office buildings out back."

"Dead?"

Ross nodded.

"Self-defense," Black said. "Want me to phone the cops?"

"No. I want you to go over to the warehouse, get a panel truck, some kind of big bucket or tub and some cement. Plant his feet in the cement, drive down to the old quarry pool at the south edge of town and dump him in a hundred feet of water."

Black looked at him in astonishment. "We're playing like 1920 gangsters now? What the hell for? You wouldn't have any trouble making self-defense stick if he shot at you first."

"I want to give Quinzel something to worry about," Ross said.

Black thought this over, started to frown and grinned instead. "I guess it might disturb Big John's sleep a little," he said.

He started off in the direction of the alley door. Ross went up to his apartment, changed into a dinner jacket and went down to the casino to take over his role of host.

At one A.M. the gambler was called away from a poker game to answer the phone. It was Helene Stoneman calling.

"I decided to look through some of Benny's papers tonight after you left," she said. "I think I found it."

"His mistress's name?"

"Well, her address. It's a letter from a woman, addressed to him at the club. The letter's only signed 'M', but there's a return address on the envelope. Nineteen twenty-two Park. The postmark is two weeks old."

"What's it say?"

"It's kind of funny. It's sort of . . . well, affectionate, but it doesn't sound much like a love letter. It mentions enjoying some evening they had together and asks if he could come to dinner the following Tuesday. That's about all. It's signed, 'Affectionately, M.'"

"I see. There's only one letter?"

"All I found. Want me to show it to Lieutenant Redfern?"

"Let him find it himself about noon," Ross said. "That will give me a chance to get in my pitch first. Thanks for calling."

"Don't mention it. Miss me?"

"Already? We haven't been parted two hours."

"You could still miss me a little," she pouted.

"All right," he said. "I miss you a little. Good-night, Helene."

"Wait a minute, Clancy. When am I going to see you again?"

"I'll call you. Good-night."

"Good-night," she said reluctantly.

Though the downstairs club closed at one thirty in conformance with local liquor laws, the gambling rooms stayed open until four. At three A.M. Ross was called to the phone again.

"Hello," Helene's voice said. "I'm still not asleep."

"Why? What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Just can't seem to sleep. I keep thinking about to-night."

"Take a pill," Ross suggested.

"You're not very romantic," she complained. "I knew you'd still be up, because Benny told me the upstairs stays open till four. What are you doing?"

"Playing poker."

"You winning?"

Ross fingered the scar on his cheek a trifle irritably. "It's a seesaw

game. Is that all you wanted? To know if I'm winning?"

"I just wanted to hear your voice. Will I see you any more before the funeral? That's day after tomorrow."

"I don't know," he said. "I'll call you. Good-night."

After he hung up, he stood staring at the phone puzzledly a few moments before returning to the game.

He got one more call before the club closed for the night. Sam Black phoned to report that his mission was accomplished.

9.

The phone next to his bed awakened Ross at eight A.M., and when he answered it a female voice he didn't recognize asked, "Mr. Ross there?"

"Speaking," the gambler said.

"Mr. Clancy Ross?"

"Right."

The woman hung up.

At first the incident puzzled him, but then light dawned. Big John Quinzel, having heard nothing from his gunman Bugsy, had taken this method to learn if Ross were still among the living.

Ross grinned to himself.

At nine, just as he was getting ready to leave the apartment, the phone rang again. This time it was Helene Stoneman.

"Did I get you up?" she asked.

"No. I've been up an hour."

"Would you like to come over here for a home-cooked dinner?"

"Tonight?" Ross said. "I really ought to stay at the club, Helene. I missed most of last night, and this place doesn't exactly run itself."

"Oh." She was silent for a few moments. "You mean you won't be able to get away any evenings any more?"

"I take nights off," Ross said patiently. "Just not two in a row."

She said, "Oh," again, then, "The funeral's tomorrow, you know. Logan's Funeral Home. Are you going?"

"I planned to. What time?"

"Two P.M. There won't be any relatives, so you can sit with me. You being Benny's employer, it will be quite proper, won't it?"

"I suppose so."

"Then I'll see you tomorrow afternoon," she said in a soft voice.

She made it sound like a rendezvous, Ross thought as he hung up, torn between irritation and amusement at the idea of a lovers' tryst taking place at the funeral of the husband of one of the lovers —.

Nineteen twenty-two Park Street was the right half of a two-story duplex house in a neighborhood of about the same economic level as Helene Stoneman's, but much older. There was no name plate on the letterbox.

A plump, plain-faced woman of about thirty answered Ross's ring. She was an ash blonde with a round Dutch-girl face which looked as

though it would normally be cheerful. At the moment it was woe-begone and the eyes were reddened from weeping.

Ross said, "Hi. I don't know your name, but does your initial happen to be M?"

The woman looked at him blankly. "I don't think I understand."

"I'm Clancy Ross. Benny Stoneman worked for me. That mean anything to you?"

Now the woman looked startled. She examined the slim gambler from his prematurely gray hair to his brightly polished shoes.

Finally she asked, "How'd you find out about me?"

"A letter Benny left lying around. You are M, aren't you?"

She shrugged hopelessly. "Come in, Mr. Ross."

He followed her into a large living room comfortably but old-fashionedly furnished with mohair furniture, marble-topped end tables and beaded lamps of the same vintage as the house. Ross chose an overstuffed chair and the woman wearily seated herself in the center of a huge sofa, her hands folded in her lap.

"Mind telling me your name?" Ross asked.

"Marion Vandeveldt," she said. "It's Dutch. What is it you want with me, Mr. Ross?"

"I'm trying to find out why Benny was killed. I'm working on my own, not with the police. You don't have to talk with me."

She reflected. "I don't mind talking to you. I suppose the police know about Benny and me anyway, since you do."

"Not yet," Ross said. "But they will in a couple of hours. You'll probably get a visit from a Lieutenant Redfern this afternoon."

He studied the woman, wondering why a man with a wife as attractive as Helene Stoneman would pick such a plain mistress. While Marion Vandeveldt was pleasant-looking enough in a well-scrubbed spinstery sort of way, Ross could hardly visualize her making a man's blood hammer in his veins.

He asked, "You live here alone, Miss Vandeveldt?"

"Yes. My folks have been dead for some years. It's just as well. If they were still alive, this scandal would kill them."

"Not necessarily," Ross said. "How long have you known Benny?"

"About six weeks. He moved here from Chicago a full month before he went to work for you, you know. We met at an open-air concert at Fallon Park. Benny loved music as much as I do, but his wife wouldn't go to concerts with him."

Mutual interest in music, Ross thought, mentally recording one clue at least to the mystery of the bookkeeper straying.

He said, "Excuse me if this sounds unnecessarily personal, but Benny didn't strike me as a Lothario. Yet he had a beautiful wife and an attractive mistress, both at least fifteen

years younger than he. Just what was his attraction?"

Her expression became one of inward contemplation, as though searching for an answer herself. Presently she said, "Ever see him smile?"

Ross reflected. "I suppose. I don't really recall."

"He didn't often," the woman said. "There wasn't much in his life to smile about. But when he did, he was a different person. His face grew young and sort of wistful, like a small boy looking at a red bicycle in a store window. It turned your heart over when he smiled. I doubt that any woman could have resisted Benny's smile. Except his wife."

"He wasn't happy with her?"

"Would he have turned to a mistress if he had been?" she asked. "I'm no competition physically to a woman as beautiful as Helene Stoneman. I've seen her picture and I look in mirrors. He came to me for the things he couldn't get at home. Companionship, and interest in the things he was interested in. Benny would never have looked at me if he'd had anything at home. Or even with nothing at home if his wife had at least been true physically. He felt justified in taking a mistress on the basis of what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

"His wife had a lover too?"

The woman gave a brittle laugh. "She chases everything in pants. Benny moved here from Chicago to break up the affair between Helene and his former boss."

"Big John Quinnet?" Ross asked in surprise.

"I don't know the Chicago employer's name. But Benny said he thought the man was relieved when Benny decided to quit his job and move here. According to Benny, Helene always throws herself so hard at the men she picks, once the novelty wears off, she becomes a nuisance. She tries to envelope her lovers, wanting to monopolize their full attention twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Benny said the affairs never last long, because the men begin to struggle away as soon as they learn what they've gotten into."

"Why the devil did Benny put up with her?" Ross asked.

"He defended her by saying she was sick," the woman said wearily. "He'd had her to a couple of psychiatrists who gave him a lot of high-sounding words about her man chasing being a compulsion she couldn't resist, stemming from too early physical development and too much popularity with boys when she was very young. The psychiatrists' explanation was that she was frantically grasping for a return of her teen-age popularity, so when men stopped chasing her after she married, she had to chase them."

Ross said dubiously, "I still don't understand why he put up with it."

"Well, their entire married life wasn't as bad as I've painted it. Benny told me that under psychiatric treatment she'd get better for a

while and start acting like a normal wife. Then along would come a new man and the merry-go-round would start all over again. I'm surprised you escaped her, Mr. Ross, being Benny's employer."

"I never met her until yesterday," Ross said.

A little ruefully he considered Helene's three phone calls since they had met in the light of what he had just learned, and he looked into the future without much enthusiasm.

Ross had very little additional conversation with the woman, but he did manage to learn that she also owned a blue sedan, in this case a Chevrolet. As he drove back to the club, he wondered if it had even occurred to Marion Vandeveldt that she was a suspect in the case.

10.

At a quarter of four that afternoon Ross was just taking Sam Black's report that the downstairs club was all set for business when the first customer arrived. It was Helene Stoneman.

Going directly to Ross, who stood talking to Sam Black near the bar, she gave him an expectant smile and asked, "Surprised to see me?"

In view of his talk with Marion Vandeveldt, Ross wasn't.

Unsmilingly he said, "Hello, Helene. What do you want?"

"I knew you wouldn't be busy so early. I thought you might buy me a drink."

She looked at Sam Black, awaiting introduction. Deliberately Ross ignored the hint. Taking her by the arm, he led her toward the front door.

"I don't mix business with pleasure, Helene," he said. "And right now I'm working. I also don't like to be chased. Go home and wait till I call you."

He half expected her to leave without even replying, but instead she said in a small voice, "Didn't last night mean anything to you?"

Studying her, Ross decided without emotion to test just how hard she was to discourage.

"No more than a hundred other nights with a hundred other women," he said with deliberate cruelty. "I'll call you if I decide I want to see you again."

And turning, he stalked toward the elevator.

A half hour later he was called to the phone.

"I just wanted to tell you I'm sorry I upset you by coming to the club," Helene's voice said. "Are you still mad?"

Despite what Marion Vandeveldt had told him, Ross was astonished. "Are you apologizing because I was rude?" he asked.

"Well, I don't want you to be mad at me."

"Then don't call me any more. If I want to see you, I'll call you."

"All right," she said in a penitent voice. Then after a pause, "Would you like me to stop up to your

apartment after the club closes tonight?"

"Oh for Christ's sake!" Ross said disagreeably, and hung up.

At seven, while Ross was having dinner downstairs, he was called to the phone again. It wasn't Helene this time, however. It was Lieutenant Niles Redfern.

"Got somebody here who wants to talk to you," the lieutenant said. "Mrs. Stoneman."

Incredulously Ross wondered if the woman had resorted to police influence to get to him. "What the hell for?" he asked.

"She's allowed one five-minute call," Redfern said. "Instead of a lawyer, she wants you. Ballistics tagged a gun I found at her house as the murder weapon, and we have a witness who saw her shoot her husband. Want to talk to her?"

"Never mind," Ross said. "I'll be down and talk to you both."

At headquarters Ross found Lieutenant Redfern in his office with a young redheaded woman the lieutenant introduced as Renée Desirée. This was obviously a stage name, and after glancing at the woman's figure, Ross guessed that her field was burlesque. She was tall, probably five-ten, with long, full-calved legs, a flat stomach, well-padded hips and an enormous torso. She wore a green knit dress under which there seemed to be nothing but skin, at least no brassiere, for her fine, up-standing breasts jiggled like molded jello with every movement.

She must have been proud of both their size and their ability to hold themselves up without artificial support, for even seated she held herself in an erect, shoulders-back posture which thrust them out in front of her like twin battering rams.

"Miss Desirée's the witness I mentioned over the phone," Redfern explained. "She was coming from the Tailspin Cocktail Lounge right across the street from your place when Stoneman got it."

Ross looked at the woman and she gave him a brilliant, white-toothed smile.

"Why'd you wait so long to report what you'd seen?" he asked.

"I didn't want to be involved in it if I didn't have to," she said glibly. "The notoriety, you know. I'm an actress, you see, and . . ."

She let it drift off into a charming shrug which made Lieutenant Redfern's eyes jump to her jiggling torso.

"Then why'd you report it at all?" Ross inquired.

She gave him another brilliant smile. "I hoped the police would catch the woman without my help. I gave them forty-eight hours, then decided I had to tell my story."

Turning to the Lieutenant, Ross said, "Sam Black was outside seconds after the shots. He didn't see anybody across the street."

"I ducked back into the Tailspin," Renée Desirée said quickly. "I didn't want anybody to see me."

Ross glanced at her, then back at

the lieutenant. "You said something over the phone about a gun."

Reaching into a drawer, Redfern brought out a .38 revolver and laid it on the desk.

"Ran across it in one of Benny Stoneman's dresser drawers while Mrs. Stoneman and I were going through his things," he said. "Ballistics tagged it as the murder weapon."

"What did Mrs. Stoneman have to say about it?"

"The gun, you mean?" Redfern shrugged. "Denied ever seeing it before. Says she's certain her husband never owned a gun. But I wired Chicago at noon, and the gun's registered up there in Benny Stoneman's name."

Ross reflected for a moment, then asked, "Doesn't it strike you as silly for her to insist it isn't Benny's gun if she really thought it was? What would it get her?"

"Nothing. She's just being contrary. Records don't lie."

"I'll bet they did this time," the gambler said. "Just as your witness here is lying."

The woman's gaze jerked at him angrily. Ross smiled at her. No one said anything for a few moments.

Finally the lieutenant, in an obvious attempt to get Ross alone in order to have him explain his last remark, said, "You want to go back to the women's section and talk to Mrs. Stoneman?"

"That won't be necessary," Ross said. "I already know everything I

have to. This is a frame, Lieutenant. If you'd like to take a little ride, I'll introduce you to the framer. If my hunch is right, you'll have your killer in an hour. If it's wrong, I'm not sticking my neck out for defamation of character. Take it or leave it."

Because he couldn't do anything else, the lieutenant decided to take it.

II.

Before the three of them left headquarters, Ross phoned Marion Vandeveldt, using the public booth in the lobby because he didn't want Redfern to hear the conversation.

When the woman answered the phone and the gambler had identified himself, he asked, "Were you in love with Benny, Miss Vandeveldt?"

"Of course," she said. "Would I have been his mistress otherwise?"

"Willing to help trap his killer?"

"Certainly," she said without hesitation. "I'll do anything I can."

For five minutes Ross explained what he wanted her to do, and why.

At the end of that time she said in a steady voice, "All right, Mr. Ross, if you think that's the only way they can be brought to justice. I'm willing to tell the lie."

"Turnabout's fair play," Ross said. "They told some pretty whopping lies in trying to frame Helene Stoneman. Got the suite number okay?"

"Seven-o-seven. And I'm to wait

in the hall until you come out to get me."

"You've got it right," he said, and hung up.

They took Ross's Lincoln instead of a police car, Ross, the lieutenant and Renée Desirée all three riding in front. Ross drove straight to the Park Plaza.

There was no conversation as they crossed the lobby to the bell captain's desk, Ross leading the way and the lieutenant following with the red-haired woman.

The bell captain, a trim, middle-aged man with an alert expression, said, "Evening, Mr. Ross. Hello, Lieutenant."

"Take a look at this woman," Ross said without preliminaries. "Ever see her before?"

The bell captain had already looked her over thoroughly as she approached. He nodded without hesitation.

"She's been in and out of seven-o-seven all week," he said. "So have a million other women, but I couldn't forget this one. Not with those . . . uh . . . she's an exceptionally good-looking girl, and I couldn't help noticing her."

The redhead said icily, "What's this supposed to prove? Any law against ladies attending parties in this hotel?"

Ross grinned at her. "It proves this. You're one of Big John Quinzel's girl friends. One among dozens. Now let's go upstairs and see Big John."

12.

The door to suite seven-o-seven was cautiously opened by the sunburned man with the missing earlobe. When he saw Clancy Ross his face turned startled and his right hand darted toward his armpit. Then he saw Lieutenant Redfern behind Ross, and froze in that position, his hand halfway out of sight.

"Little jumpy, aren't you, Horton?" the gambler asked dryly.

Redfern pushed forward then, shoving the door wide open so that the bodyguard had to step back to avoid getting it in the face. As the lieutenant strode inside, Horton looked sullenly from him to Ross, then spotted Renée Desirée still standing in the hall, and his expression turned wary.

Ross motioned the girl in, pushed the door shut and pointed after the lieutenant, who had stopped in the center of the room and was looking inquiringly at the closed doors on either side.

"Where's Quinzel?" he asked the bodyguard.

Horton crossed to the door on the left and discreetly knocked on the panel. Renée Desirée seated herself in an easy chair. Ross and the lieutenant remained standing.

A heavy voice from within the other room called, "What the hell you want?"

"Lieutenant Redfern's here," Horton called back. "With Clancy Ross and some dame."

There was the sound of creaking bedsprings, a lengthy silence, then the door opened. Big John Quinnel came out buttoning his coat. Under it he hadn't bothered to button his shirt and he wore no tie. His oily hair was mussed and there was a streak of lipstick on one cheek.

After surveying the trio of visitors silently, he turned and growled back into the bedroom, "Hurry it up and scram. Looks like I got business."

Another few moments passed before a vivid blonde with a body nearly as interesting as Renée Desirée's came from the bedroom. Her hair was a little mussed too, but apparently she had taken time to put her makeup in order. As she came into the room she was pulling a fur coat on over a flaming red evening gown.

With an embarrassed glance around, the blonde went straight to the door, pulled it open and then looked back at Quinnel.

"Call you tomorrow," the big man said heavily.

As the door closed behind the blonde, Quinnel said to Larry Horton, "Get the other one out too."

The bodyguard crossed to the second door, opened it, looked in and crooked his finger. A lissome brunette, fully dressed including a fur coat, came out.

"Party's over," Horton said.

The brunette didn't look around embarrassedly as the blonde had. She walked out without a glance at anyone.

When the door had closed behind the second woman, Quinnel nodded to the lieutenant, barely flicked his eyes over Clancy Ross, then looked at the redhead without a sign of recognition.

"Pretty good act," Ross commented. "But we already established downstairs that she's been popping in and out of this place like a jack-in-the-box all week."

The big man looked at the redhead again. "Has she?" he asked without interest. "So damn many dolls been in and out of here the past week, I wouldn't recognize half of them."

"You recognize this one," Ross assured him. "She's the one you paid to claim she saw Helene Stoneman shoot her husband."

13.

Quinnel looked at the woman steadily and she said in an urgent voice, "He's shooting at the moon, John. I didn't even tell him I knew you. He got that from the bell captain."

Without heat Quinnel said, "Clam up and stay that way." Then he looked at Redfern. "What's on your mind, Lieutenant? I don't have to answer any questions by this tin-horn, but you got anything to ask, go ahead."

Ross said, "I wasn't planning on asking questions, Quinnel. I'm going to do all the talking." He turned to the lieutenant. "Remember how

Quinnel, his two bodyguards and three women all swore alibis for each other for the time of the shooting?"

Redfern nodded.

"This guy," Ross said, pointing at Larry Horton, "walked out of the Rotunda not fifteen seconds ahead of Benny Stoneman. Sam Black can testify to that in court."

Lieutenant Redfern scowled first at the sunburned man, then at Ross. "You waited a nice long time before dropping this bit of news."

Big John Quinnel said suavely, "I guess we shouldn't have held out on you, Lieutenant. It's true Larry saw the shooting. But he couldn't give any description of the killer except that she was a woman. He wouldn't of been much help to you, and getting himself tied up as a murder witness would of loused up our whole vacation. I'll admit we was wrong in rigging him an alibi, but it wasn't because he had anything to do with the shooting. I just wanted him to keep his nose clean."

Lieutenant Redfern's face was like a thundercloud, but Ross held off the storm with an upraised palm. "You didn't coach Horton well enough, Quinnel. He should never have admitted to me that he saw the woman."

When the big man merely looked at him without expression, Ross said to the lieutenant, "Horton here is one of Quinnel's personal bodyguards. If the woman he claims he saw kill Benny Stoneman was

Helene Stoneman, he couldn't have helped recognizing her the minute he saw her. She used to be his boss's mistress. That's why Stoneman moved here from Chicago. To break up the affair. Horton must have seen her dozens of times."

Horton said uncertainly, "It was dark that night . . ." then clamped his jaw shut at a look from his employer.

"The motive for the killing was the one I first suggested to you, Lieutenant," Ross went on cheerfully. "But Quinnel wanted a patsy to take the rap, because if the killing went unsolved, suspicion would point straight at him. He probably picked Helene Stoneman because he wanted to get her out of his hair anyway. Helene is the kind of gal who hangs on to a man long after he wants to shake her. Matter of fact she's so persistent, she's been to psychiatrists in an attempt to get herself cured of running after her lovers so hard. She was still chasing Quinnel the day after her husband died. I saw them come out of the bar downstairs together. Probably that's when he planted the gun. He took her home that day, and it would have been simple to slip into the bedroom and plant it while Helene was in the kitchen mixing drinks, or repairing makeup in the bathroom."

Quinnel snorted, "You're talking through your hat," and Redfern said dubiously, "The gun *was* registered to Stoneman."

"With this guy's influence in

Chicago, he could get any record fixed," Ross said. "All he had to do was pick up a phone. He practically runs the political machine up there."

While the lieutenant thought this over, Ross went on, "Every bit of evidence points to Quinnel ordering the killing and Horton pulling it. Five shots placed in a circle you could cover with your hand. No one but a professional gunnie is that good. Point two: Quinnel tried to have me bumped after I pounded an admission out of Horton that he'd seen a woman kill Benny. He wouldn't bother to finger me just in revenge for bouncing around his bodyguard. He wanted me cut down because he's smarter than Horton, and he knew the minute the story of Helene's arrest came out, I'd recognize it as a frame because Horton should have been able to recognize her if she'd actually been the killer. Point three: Quinnel had a strong motive both for the kill and the frameup. Point four: his gunnie was right on the scene and later rigged an alibi."

When the gambler stopped, there was a long period of silence.

Then Quinnel said heavily, "Prove it, tinhorn. I gather from what you've been spouting that this woman here positively identified Helene Stoneman as the killer and that the gun's registered in her dead husband's name. So prove different."

"Oh, I have proof," Ross said in an offhand manner. "Hold things for a minute."

Going to the door, he disappeared into the hallway and returned with Marion Vandeveldt.

"Meet Miss Marion Vandeveldt," he announced generally. "A regular patron of Club Rotunda." He designated Lieutenant Redfern. "Miss Vandeveldt, this man is a police officer. Tell him about the night before last."

The woman said, "I was on the club's second floor, and I went over to the front windows for a breath of air. I looked down at the street just as a man coming from the front door of the club was shot. I saw everything quite clearly, including the face of the person who did the shooting."

"Who was it?" Redfern asked.

Slowly she looked around the room, her gaze merely flicking over Renée Desirée, lingering only briefly on Big John Quinnel, and finally settling on Larry Horton.

She made sure of the sunburned complexion and the missing earlobe Ross had described over the phone before saying in a tone of certainty, "That's the gunman right there."

The instant she spoke Larry Horton's hand dived for his armpit. Lieutenant Redfern's motion was just as fast, but he started later. Clancy Ross started later too, and his movement didn't seem nearly as hurried as those of the other two men.

Its easy flow was deceptive, however. The lieutenant was just beginning to draw his gun, and Hor-

ton's was just centering on Ross's chest, when the gambler's .38 automatic spoke.

Horton slammed backward, stumbling over an easy chair and smashing to the floor on his back with his legs up in the air. Ross's gun arched sidewise just as Big John Quinnel's cleared its holster. The gambler waited until the muzzle of Quinnel's gun had nearly steadied on him, then very deliberately placed a shot precisely between the big man's eyes.

Lieutenant Redfern stood with his pistol muzzle drooping downward, staring from one dead man to the other and back again. After moving his head back and forth

several times, he glared at Clancy Ross.

"You could have put one through Quinnel's shoulder," he accused. "You had plenty of time."

"I guess I got rattled," Ross said. "It scares me to have people point guns at me."

The lieutenant, belatedly realizing that the gambler had deliberately created a situation which would end in gunplay, when he could just as easily have turned over the information he had to Redfern and have let an orderly arrest be made, also realized that there wasn't much he could do about it aside from swearing a little.

He decided to do that.



Sound Sleeper

Ervin Baker, a Baton Rouge, La., taxi driver, told police that, while he was sleeping in his cab, a thief removed his trousers and stole \$4 from the pockets.

Mighty Mites

In Detroit, Matthew Williams, 26, welcomed the arrival of police when they came to a church to arrest him. Although he was six feet tall and weighed 200 pounds, Williams required medical aid before he was booked for petit larceny. Sixteen women began beating him when he was caught taking money from the purse of one of the women.

On the other hand, officers at Grand Rapids, Mich., are looking for the "strong man" burglar who broke into the home of Herschel Latham. Latham said nothing was missing when he returned home, but a thick telephone book had been torn in half.



A Casebook Story

BY JACK SWORD

Statement of Mitchell Curzon

TOM HURLEY, the feature editor of our local paper, called me into his office a couple of months ago.

"Mitch," he said to me, "remember the Forbes case at Pebble Beach last year?"

"Sure I remember it," I said. Who wouldn't? It was the biggest sensation on the peninsula in years.

"Weren't you the reporter who covered it?" asked Hurley.

"Yes, I did."

"It happened just about a year ago," said Hurley thoughtfully. "I want you to write a feature on it. And don't hash over the same old stuff again."

"For something different," I suggested, "I can track down the people who knew Mayne, find out what kind of a home he came from, things like that. Only I'd have to interview a lot of people who are scattered all over the country."

Dead Soldier

Mayne was a machine — a machine with only one purpose in life. The police had to stop him before it was too late . . .

Hurley leaned back in his swivel chair and stared at the wall. "You've got something," he said, "Get everything about Mayne you can find. Write it up from that angle."

Back at my desk I tried to figure out where to begin. Nobody knew much about Mayne. The newspaper files only covered his brief, but spectacular, stay at Pebble Beach. I recalled that a man who claimed to be his father had come here from San Francisco shortly after the case was closed. I decided that was the best place to start.

During the next eight weeks I covered a lot of ground and talked to a great many people. When I came back to Monterey I had several interviews plus photostatic copies of documents I had located in Washington and Chicago. All I needed to complete my story was a look at the files in the Sheriff's office here, and I didn't have any trouble doing that.

I sorted it all out and took it to Hurley. It started with an interview of Mayne's father.

Interview with Edward Mayne

Yes, I'm Robert's father. So you want to know something about him when he was a kid? I'll make it short.

Bob's mother died when he was two. We were in Indo-China then. I guess that you could call me a — oh, I don't know — call it a soldier-of-fortune, if you want to. I don't

like the word, but it describes what I did as well as anything I can think of. At the time Mary died I was engaged in a very delicate and slightly illegal business transaction, so I wasn't able to take Bob to his mother's relatives in the States. When I could see my way clear to leaving Saigon, I decided to keep him with me.

For the next twenty years we travelled through the Orient together. I sent Bob to school when I had the chance and, when we were in places where there were no schools, I taught him what I knew. By the time he was sixteen, he had picked up a lot of miscellaneous knowledge the average boy never learns.

A fellow hiding out in the Malay States who claimed he was from Arizona took a liking to Bob and showed him a number of different tricks with a gun — fast draw, snap shooting from the hip, firing while he was sprawled on his back, things like that. In the Molucca Islands Bob learned how to use a knife, and while we were in north-eastern Afghanistan he picked up the best way to strangle a man with a scarf or a piece of wire. He finished up by taking lessons from a Thaiander on how to fight with his hands and feet.

Bob never had any close friends. We didn't stay in one place long enough. Because of the nature of my business, I never trusted anyone completely and I instilled the same idea into him. By the time he was

23, he was as much my partner as my son. He was the ideal companion, tight-mouthed, efficient, absolutely trustworthy, but completely ruthless if crossed.

We were in Sumatra when the Japs hit Pearl Harbor. We got out of there fast. Several months later we arrived in the States via South Africa and Brazil. It was the first time Bob had been in America since he was a baby. To him it was as strange as the Orient would be to the average American.

We visited his mother's relatives in Pennsylvania, but that didn't turn out too well. One day Bob was in the woods practicing with his knife when one of the cousins saw him. It didn't take long for word of this to spread through the little rural community, and the people began to treat Bob like he was a freak. Something they humored because they were afraid.

Bob wasn't handsome, but he had the sort of rugged-looking face that attracts women like flies around honey. I saw there would be an explosion if we stayed much longer. Sooner or later one of the local yokels would resent Bob and take a crack at the "foreigner" and get hurt bad — so Bob and I pulled out for San Francisco. By that time the war was going full blast, so Bob enlisted.

Extract from records of Adjutant General, Department of the Army

Robert Mayne, enlisted from San

Francisco, California. 5' 11", 180 lbs, black hair, grey eyes. Assigned as follows:

Basic training, Camp Rogers
16th Ranger Battalion, Camp

Kettner

9th Ranger Battalion, England

747th Special Group, Germany

23rd Special Group, Birmingham, Alabama

98th Special Ranger Battalion, Korea

Interview with James Novak

I was Mayne's First Sergeant in the 16th Rangers. He joined us while we were still training in the States. When he reported in I knew we had a good soldier. He had that air of confidence which marks a man of action.

He never did say much. He carried out his training assignments better than anyone in the battalion, but he didn't fit in off-duty. I never saw him take a drink, pick up a girl, or get into any kind of trouble the way a high-strung bunch will do occasionally. At first the boys tried to make friends with him, but when he didn't respond to their overtures they left him alone.

One night 'Swede' Sanson, a big, rough and rugged character from the lumber country up in Washington, said something to Mayne that started a first class brawl. Sanson outweighed Mayne by forty pounds but, if the boys hadn't broken it up,

Mayne would have killed him. After Mayne worked over a few more of the tougher element, the rest of the men began to treat him with a respect that had quite a bit of fear mixed into it. Mayne never took advantage of their attitude. He just went his own way. He seemed to say, "Leave me alone and I won't bother you."

We were shipped to Italy, and that's when we began to put our training to use. We spent most of our time on hit and run raids that kept the Germans off-balance. Mayne was tops in the business. He worked right along with the rest of the squad, but he still kept to himself. I tried to talk to him once or twice, but although he was polite and respectful, I had a feeling like I was hammering against a wall. I don't think he ever trusted anybody. He reminded me of a robot — except he had a brilliant mind and used it.

Finally we made one raid too many. We ran into trouble and some of us, including Mayne and myself, were captured. The Germans sent us to a PW camp and eventually we ended up in a city called Straubing in South-Eastern Germany, working on the railroad as forced laborers.

We had been in the PW camp about six months, when one evening, as we were going back to camp from work, Mayne slipped behind our guard and strangled him with a piece of wire. Then he grabbed me

and we took off — just like that. You'd think that without food, no clothing, no map, nothing, that we wouldn't get far, but we did. We made little raids for food as we worked westward. Even though I outranked him, I took my orders from Mayne. It was obvious that if we made it at all, we were going to make it with him in command.

We only moved at night, and every time we met somebody, that person would die. Mayne didn't want anyone telling the German authorities about our possible whereabouts. Me, I figured we were marking our trail by the bodies we left behind, but I knew if we were ever recaptured we'd be shot, so I played along.

When we got into France we managed to contact the underground, and we were taken to Gibraltar and turned over to the English. I tried to thank Mayne, but he told me in so many words that he brought me along because he didn't think he could make it alone, and I was the only prisoner who could have stayed with him. I wanted to be grateful, but how can you warm up to a guy who acts like you were another piece of necessary equipment, like the wire he used to kill the guard, or the big knife he picked up on the way through Germany.

We were shipped to England, and because we were escaped PWs, we didn't have to go back to a combat unit. I was glad to get out with a

whole skin, so I transferred to a desk job. Mayne asked to be sent to another Ranger outfit, and the last I heard of him he was operating with the 9th in France shortly after D-Day.

Interview with Charles Lawson

The 747th Special Group was formed shortly after VE day. We handled a variety of assignments — all of those necessary jobs that must be done for a government which is unofficially at war with another. We were strictly on our own. If one of our men got into trouble we denied his existence. It was hard, dirty work, but the excitement and the opportunity to act without being restricted by laws and regulations which govern the conduct of the average person appealed to the type of men we used.

I have no idea how Mayne heard about us. Our organization was highly classified in those days. At all events he joined us. I asked him how he heard of the SG, but he never answered. He did volunteer the information that his Ranger Battalion had been deactivated and we were the nearest thing to the same type of work.

He turned into one of the best operatives we had. He was quiet and competent. No matter what kind of a job he had to do, he did it and did it well. He seemed to thrive on excitement, although I never

saw him come out of his shell. The other men respected him, but they didn't like him. You can't like something you don't know. Most of our men spent their free time with their mistresses, or carousing in cafes. Mayne never did. If he ever had anything to do with a woman it was an overnight attachment and nothing more. The man was the nearest thing I ever saw to a machine.

In late '49 he was sent to one of our units in Birmingham, Alabama, on a special project.

Interview with George Grayson

I don't know much about Robert Mayne. I don't think anyone was ever really close to him except my daughter Frances, and of course she can't tell you anything about him now.

Mayne met Frances accidentally. It was the winter of '49 and Frances was stalled on the highway between Birmingham and Montgomery. It was late at night and there weren't many cars on the road. Mayne stopped and fixed the car — it just required some minor adjustment. Evidently he took her license plate number and traced it down, because a few days later he showed up at the house.

I didn't care for him when we first met. He was polite enough, but he just ignored me — acted as if I didn't matter one way or the other.

At that, maybe I didn't, but at least he could have shown some interest. He talked with Frances for a while and then left. He kept coming to see her and they began to go out together a great deal. I still didn't like it. Mayne's attitude was "you're her father, so I'll notice you, but you don't interest me." I tried to tell Frances that he was the wrong kind of man for her, but she said that I was prejudiced. By this time she was completely infatuated with him.

A couple of months later Mayne came to me and asked for permission to marry Frances. Even though they had been seeing each other almost every day, he caught me by surprise. I pointed out that Frances was of age, and if she wanted to marry, I couldn't stop her. Mayne agreed, but said that he would rather have my permission, as it would make Frances happy. I wanted to refuse, but since I knew they would go ahead and get married anyway I gave my reluctant blessing.

After they came back from their honeymoon I noticed a change in Mayne. He started to become a human being. He would relax when I came to visit them and sometimes he broke down enough to tell me some of his adventures with his father in little known corners of the world. This change kept increasing as time went on, and I imagine that if nothing had interrupted it, he would have turned into a normal citizen in a few years.

When Frances told him she was going to have a baby, he waited on her hand and foot and did all the idiotic things a man will do in the first blush of enthusiasm.

He started to take an interest in the kids in the neighborhood. He was always pretty handy with his hands and he began to fix up the toys the kids broke. It wasn't long before every mother in the neighborhood would head for Mayne's house if little Johnnie didn't show up for supper, and nine times out of ten she would find her kid there. Next thing Mayne did was to join a class that taught expectant fathers how to act and what to do when the baby arrived. I strolled into their home one evening and caught Mayne practicing how to change diapers. He was using a big doll he had borrowed from somebody in the neighborhood. Man! Marriage will certainly do strange things to some people.

About that time the Korean "police action" started. Mayne was told that he was going to be shipped to Korea to join a newly formed Ranger outfit there. He tried to pull strings to stay in Birmingham, but they needed men like him too badly. When he left he asked Frances to name the baby George Edward after the two grandfathers.

Interview with Isaac Levin

I was glad to see Mayne when he

joined the 98th in Korea. I knew him from the old 9th Rangers in Europe. He was a sort of legend after his escape from Germany.

I was surprised at the change in him. He wasn't stand-offish anymore. He had turned into one swell guy. The change hadn't taken away any of his old ability, though. When Bob was part of a squad going on a raid, everybody had a comfortable feeling because he was along. But off duty was when he really showed the change. He bent my ear by the hour about his wife back in Alabama. And when the kid arrived — it was a boy — I had to admire a new picture with every letter he got from home. I didn't mind, though. He was my buddy and if listening to him about his family and his plans for them when he got back to the States made him any happier, I was glad to oblige.

Along sometime in '52, we got in a big hassle with the gooks up in the Wonjon area. We were running raids into their territory after the Navy had landed us on the coast behind their lines. Finally some Korean who was supposedly working for us decided to change sides and we were nailed. The gooks didn't torture us too much and we ended up in a PW cage near Pyongyang.

Somehow we lived through it, in spite of the bad food, overwork, and ill-treatment by the guards. One day Bob told me that he thought it might be possible to escape, but he

didn't want to take the chance. He was willing to sit it out until he could go back to his wife in one piece.

When we finally got exchanged at the end of the war, Bob insisted on going straight home without stopping over in a hospital to rest up and get his strength back. He promised to write and keep in touch with me, but I never heard from him again.

Interview with Marlin Grayson

I'm Frances' uncle. In 1952 Frances decided to take a trip to Minnesota and show off the baby to our relatives there. I went along to help drive.

We got to Chicago late one evening. We were going north on Michigan Avenue when a car came whipping down the wrong side of the street at a tremendous rate of speed. Frances tried to pull in to the curb, but there was a terrific crash as the other car hit us, and I blacked out.

When I regained consciousness, I was in the hospital. Frances and George Edward were dead. I told the authorities to notify my brother George and he arrived a couple of days later. We took Frances and her child back home for burial and notified the Red Cross, asking them to get in touch with Bob. When we got to Birmingham there was a telegram from the army waiting

for Frances. It said that Bob was missing in action.

*Extract from The Daily World,
Chicago Newspaper*

Paul Forbes, age 24, of Pebble Beach, California, was tried yesterday for an accident which occurred on Michigan Avenue in which two people were killed and one injured. Originally the charge had been manslaughter, drunken driving and speeding. The charge was reduced to reckless driving by Assistant City Attorney Luther Kapsa to "further the interests of justice". Judge Maystreet agreed and Forbes was fined \$500 and given a one year suspended sentence.

*Interview with
Police Lieutenant James Clancy*

Yeah, I remember this fellow Mayne. He got in to see me and wanted to know why Forbes was let off so easy. I couldn't tell him that Maystreet and Kapsa were a couple of crooked snakes. Everybody in the police department knew that Forbes' old man had come from California and waved a lot of dough in the Judge's face and the boy got off with a slap on the wrist.

Like I said, though, at the time I couldn't tell Mayne that. Maystreet and Kapsa were still going strong, and it wasn't until later

that we were able to get the goods on them and put them away for a long stretch.

When Mayne saw he couldn't get any satisfaction from me he clammed up. His face went blank. I saw him die right in front of me. His eyes were the only thing alive, and they had the most terrible look of hate in them that I've ever seen. At the time I thought the look was for me, and since I knew what the fellow was going through, I tried to shrug it off as just something that a cop has to take and live with.

*Extract from Log of Sheriff's Office,
Monterey County, California*

At 10:53 A.M. a call was received from the home of John Forbes at Pebble Beach. The speaker, identifying himself as Manuel Segura, the gardener, said that Forbes was sprawled in a rose bush in the garden, dead. Deputies and an ambulance were immediately dispatched to the scene.

Extract from report of Deputy Parl

On arrival at the Forbes home in Pebble Beach, I was taken to the garden by Manuel Segura. I found John Forbes entangled in a rose bush. He had been stabbed through the heart. The knife had entered with considerable force. It had gone cleanly between the ribs and into

the chest cavity without touching the bone.

Questioning of members of the household (see attached statements) pointed to the probability that the crime had been committed by one of the servants. This opinion is expressed because all of the people involved were emphatic in saying that John Forbes invariably worked in his garden between the hours of 10 and 11 every morning, and that he was not to be disturbed during this time under any circumstances. This knowledge was confined to the household and a few intimate friends.

All of the suspects were cautioned to remain in the area.

*Extract from report of Deputy
Kingsman*

Two days after the murder of John Forbes, his son Paul came to this office in a very perturbed state of mind. He showed me a letter he had received through the mail that morning. The message had been made up by cutting out words from a newspaper and pasting them on a sheet of stationery. The message:

Your father supplied the money to get you off from a murder charge. He has paid for his part. You are next. While you wait you can sweat, never knowing where it is coming from, or who will give it to you or how.

The letter was tested for finger-

prints, but only those of Paul Forbes were found. The paper had been wiped clean before mailing.

Under prolonged questioning Forbes told me the story of his traffic accident in Chicago. He was assigned Deputy Baker as a guard and told to return to his home.

*Telegram to Chicago Police
Department*

What is the name and address of the woman who was killed in a crash on Michigan Avenue in August 1952? Driver of the vehicle which caused her death named Paul Forbes.

Sheriff's Office, Monterey

Telegram to Sheriff's Office, Monterey

Mrs. Robert Mayne, 1743 Raiment Street, Birmingham, Alabama.
Leary, Lt.

*Telegram to Birmingham, Alabama,
Police*

Can you inform us of present whereabouts of Robert Mayne, 1743 Raiment Street?

Sheriff's Office, Monterey

Telegram to Sheriff's Office, Monterey

Present whereabouts of Mayne

unknown. According to father-in-law Grayson, Mayne disappeared after returning from Korea and finding out about death of his wife.

Clayton, Capt.

*Telegram to Adjutant General,
Department of the Army*

Where is Robert Mayne currently stationed? He is a soldier recently returned from Korea. Home address is 1743 Raiment Street, Birmingham, Alabama.

Sheriff's Office, Monterey

Telegram to Sheriff's Office, Monterey

Robert Mayne was discharged from army on return from Korea. No other address available.

Farkins, Lt. Col.

Extract from report of Deputy Baker

Deputy Kingsman assigned me to guard Paul Forbes.

"From what I can gather, after listening to Forbes' story about the Chicago incident," Kingsman told me, "I feel that we are dealing with a homicidal maniac who is bent on revenge. This man most probably doesn't care what happens to him, as long as he gets Forbes."

As soon as we arrived at his home at Pebble Beach, Forbes headed for

the whiskey bottle. By evening he was in a stupor.

This routine went on for the balance of the week, and then Forbes started to snap out of it. He decided to work on his racing car in the garage.

He and Mike Dooley, the chauffeur, started to work. I watched them for a while and then went to the kitchen for a drink of water. I was filling the glass from the tap when I heard Forbes scream. I barrellled out of the kitchen and across the lawn towards the garage. I could see Forbes on his knees, his hands clasped in an attitude of prayer, with Dooley standing over him, holding a knife lightly in his fingers.

I pulled out my gun. "Drop it, Dooley," I called.

Dooley looked over his shoulder. "The name is Mayne, Robert Mayne," he yelled, and then barked a short laugh.

Then he threw the knife — hard. It buried itself in Forbes' throat. I took a shot at him. He staggered against the garage door and then recovered. Before I had time to fire again he had slipped around the corner and was heading for the beach at a run. I followed and I saw him swim slowly towards a point of land about half a mile down the beach. As I watched, a giant wave smashed into him and up-ended him in a tangle of arms and legs. He disappeared.

The body has not been recovered.





Fog

He couldn't stop looking at the woman. And he knew she didn't want him to stop . . .

BY GIL BREWER

AT DUSK he turned into the new housing development on the far edge of town and drove slowly, craning his neck out the window, looking at street signs. He reached Wimbolton Drive, stopped looking, and drove down the palm-shaded street. The cement block houses along here were very similar to one another, assuming a sameness of color with the approach of night. Daytime the same houses were vivid blues, pinks, reds, yellows. He craned his neck again, stopped the coupé by a small, new place. 46

He got out, started across the

newly planted lawn, glanced back once. Across the street was a small ditch, an endless roadside row of Australian pines, and beyond the ditch and the pines was a humpy, shadowy field that stretched far into the country.

His heels scraped on the raw cement porch. He was tall, dark, wearing a light-colored sport shirt. The house was already well-lighted inside, though it was not yet completely night.

He grinned, pressed the buzzer. Somebody inside the house began running across the floor, fast. Feet skidded by the door. The door was flung open.

"Oh!" a young woman said, breathing sharply. She smiled, then went sober. "Oh?"

"Uh — is Art around?"

The young woman shook her head. She was a blonde. Her hair was very thick, bursting in thick waves around her throat and shoulders. "He's not here."

"I see. Well . . ."

She smiled again, watching him with wide clear blue eyes. "It is Mr. Thompson you wanted?"

"Yes. Then you must be —"

"I'm Mrs. Thompson, yes."

"Well — you see, I'm an old friend of Art's. Haven't seen him — since you and he were married. I was in town, thought I'd drop around. He wrote me where he was living —"

"You're not Bill Calders!"

He grinned. "That's right. I suppose you —"

"Why! Art's mentioned you at least a million times!"

He kept grinning at her.

"Well, come on in!"

"Well, only for a —"

"Don't be silly. Come on in here, Bill."

She moved aside and he stepped in and she closed the door.

"Goodness," she said. "Imagine!"

"So you're Sarah?"

She nodded, watching him. She

was wearing a blue cotton house-dress. She was in her bare feet. She stood with her hands on her hips, her hips thrown forward, and her lips were very broad and red.

"Come on into the living room," she said, turning. "Sit down."

"Well, only for a minute."

He followed her into the other room from the narrow hall. She moved quickly, firmly, large-hipped under the scant blue dress. His gaze followed her. Her flesh moved and trembled under the dress. Bright glaring light from an unshaded floor lamp beside a small, bulging brown couch shone clearly through the material of the dress between her legs.

Bill turned his eyes away quickly as she faced him again.

"Peeking?" she said.

Bill's face went red.

"It's so hot," she said. "You know? I really don't like to wear anything. Nothing at all. Just naked, all the time."

He forced a sorry chuckle. She beamed at him, flopped on the couch, watching him steadily. She motioned toward a chair across from the couch.

"Sit down, Bill!"

He sat quietly, carefully. He glanced once back toward the doorway, then at her, then at the windows above the back of the couch. The unshaded lamplight was brilliant white, glaring on the new maroon rug, the newly painted walls, the bright new everything

with scratches here and there in the new paint. She looked pale, her lips vivid in the light.

"When'll Art be along?"

"Soon, soon. What d'you know about that?"

She bounced up and down on the couch, pressed her palms together, forced the spaded hands between her thighs, pushing the dress between her thighs, squeezing her legs tightly together on her hands, watching him.

"Uh, where *is* he?"

"Oh, he had to run out for a while. Won't *he* be surprised?"

She bounced up, jumped onto the couch on her knees and leaned over the back, reaching toward the window. She lay straight up across the couch, her toes pushing at the maroon rug and her dress drew tight up past the hollows of her knees. She yanked at the shade on the windows, drew it down to the sill with a loud *Whirrrrrrr!*

"Neighbors," she said. "Nosy neighbors, you know? The houses are so close together."

She turned and flopped back on the couch, bouncing, fanning her face with her palm and with the other hand plucking at the hem of her dress.

"Hot?" he said.

"Whew!" she said. "You know it!"

He nodded, swallowed. His face was coated with a fine sheen of perspiration. He kept looking around the room, but his eyes always came back to her with a kind of jerk.

"Art's not too well," she said. "Did you know?"

"No. What's the matter?"

"Nerves. Terribly nervous. He can't sit still. Can't sleep nights. Then he comes home from work and sleeps all day." She laughed shortly, showing even glistening teeth. "Really nervous."

"Well, I'm sure sorry to hear that."

"Yes," she said. She brought her hands back and began lifting her hair up and down, away from her throat and the back of her neck, plopping it up and down.

"Guess I better run along," Bill said, glancing at his wrist watch. "Tell you what. I'm staying overnight in town. I'll drop by tomorrow. How's that?"

"Don't go," she said, watching him closely, narrowly.

He started to laugh. Something caught in his throat and he had to cough. He went into a short fit of coughing. She leaped up, came across to him, slapped his back.

"There!" she said. "Gosh, you got all red!"

"Sorry."

"Where are you staying, Bill?"

"Hotel. The Town House."

"Oh." She returned to the couch, flopped down. She took the hem of her dress in both hands and slowly began lifting it back past her knees, dragging it up her thighs, watching him. "You don't mind if I pull my dress up a little, do you, Bill?"

He stared at her. She kept on

dragging it up and up, watching him. Her eyes were narrow as she watched him. She ceased, patted it down snugly, rubbed her thighs with her palms. Then she leaned back and began plopping her hair up and down again with both hands, away from the back of her neck.

"He should be right along. So don't go. He'd feel awful if he missed seeing you."

Her legs were very white in the glare of lamplight. They were smoothly curved, plump and unblemished. She began to hum, watching him, plopping her hair up and down. It was very thick hair, damp looking at the temples. There were small beads of perspiration on her upper lip.

It was very silent in the room.

Bill was not more than two and a half feet from Sarah and the lamplight was like a hot sun.

"It's raining," she said. "Hear it?"

They sat, listening. Rain drummed softly on the roof. It dripped on the screens outside the windows.

"I knew it would rain," she said. She writhed from side to side on the couch, straightening a little, watching him. "Say!" She leaped up. "How's for a cold beer? I simply forgot. There's some in the kitchen. Everything's so new, we're so unsettled here. We've been here five months — I can't get over it."

"Really, Sarah — I'll have to go. Some things I've got to attend to."

She moved up to his chair, standing close, with the lamplight behind

her. She put one hand on his shoulder. "I wish you'd wait a little while, Bill."

He stood up fast.

"Won't you have just one beer?" she asked softly.

"Sorry. Thanks," he said. "Take a rain check on that, though."

She watched him, smiling, her teeth tight together. "All right," she said quickly. She turned and moved into the hall. He followed her, watching her. She whirled on him.

"Peeking again?"

He walked into the hall without speaking.

She reached the door, opened it.

"You don't want to go out in all that rain."

"Got to. You tell Art I was by, huh? See you two tomorrow."

"Well — all right."

"Sure glad to meet you, Sarah."

"Yes." She held out her hand and he took it. He looked at her and she smiled. She held to his hand. He drew his hand slightly away, but she still held to his hand. Then she let go and stepped back and he turned and went outside into the rain. She called after him, softly:

"Good-by, Bill."

He turned and flapped his hand at her, running across the wet, muddy lawn. In the car he glanced toward the doorway of the house. She was standing there, looking out at the night.

A telephone rang.

Bill reached out from his bed and

turned on the light on the nightstand. He found the phone.

"Hello? . . . Sarah? Yes, but it's — it's nearly two," he said into the phone, checking his wrist watch on the night stand. "What? Art's what? Well, now just relax, take it easy. I'm sure everything's all right. . . . Yes . . . I'll be right out. . . . Yes, sure, Sarah." He hung up and lay there a moment, staring at the silent window of his room, rubbing his jaw.

He finally swung his feet down to the floor, scratched his shoulder, stood up and took off his pajamas. He lumbered into the bathroom, washed quickly, returned to the bedroom and dressed in dark slacks and the same white sport shirt he'd worn earlier. He stepped into a pair of brown loafers, strapped on his wrist-watch, pocketed wallet, change and cigarettes and matches from the top of his bureau.

It was very foggy outside. He had to drive slowly and after he was in the new development again, he had to stop the car and get out and check every street sign until finally he saw Wimbolton Drive.

He parked the car, started up toward the house. The living room light was on, glaring against the shade yellowly.

Fog rolled and billowed and the air was damp, dripping, tepid. His feet scraped on the cement porch. The door opened.

"Oh, Bill!"

"Now, take it easy," he said.

"Come on in."

She was still wearing the blue cotton dress. She had on a pair of beach sandals and she was very excited, her movements quick.

"Bill, something's happened to Art! I know it!"

"What?" He looked at her closely, standing in the hall.

She took hold of his hands with both of hers.

"I hated to call you. There was nobody else to call. We don't know a soul — not a soul!"

He didn't say anything. Neither did she. Finally he said, "What about the neighbors?"

"They're nosy neighbors," she said. "We have no use for them. It's better that way."

"Well, you'd better tell me about it."

"Come into the other room." She dropped his hands, turned and hurried into the living room. He followed her, watching her move. The unshaded light was exactly as it had been before.

They stood in the center of the room.

"Art came home, just after you left. I told him you were here, where you were staying. He said he was going to phone you. Then, he said there was something he had to attend to first." She stared at him. She put her hands together and held her shoulders hunched up and licked her lips.

"Go on."

"He was laughing, full of fun,"

she said. "He said he was going out a minute, then he'd come back and phone you. I watched him from the doorway. He went out there, across the road. Into the fog. He went into that field, over there. It was hours ago. He never came back."

Bill laughed. He reached out and patted her shoulder. She moved her shoulder toward his hand and stepped an inch closer to him. Her breathing was loud in the room.

"You're imagining things," he said. "Art can take care of himself."

She shook her head fiercely. Her hair ruffled on her shoulders. "No. He went out there into that fog and he didn't come back. I know something's happened." Her voice rose. "I know it, I tell you!"

Bill looked quickly around the room, then took her shoulder in the cup of his hand. She hunched her shoulder into his hand, looking up at him with her lips parted, making small moaning sounds. There were three buttons on the throat of her dress and the top button was undone. She reached up and unbuttoned another button and the bright light glared on the unbroken smooth white of her flesh.

"I'm afraid to go out there alone," she said. "Will you go out there with me? I've got to go out there and look for him!"

He looked at her. She moved closer.

"Yes, sure, all right. We'll go have a look."

"Oh, yes!"

They moved quickly through the house and out the front door.

"We should have a flashlight," he said. "You got a flash?"

"No," she said. "There's no time for that."

He looked at her. She kept looking at him, then over across the street at the billowing fog and the field beyond the Australian pines.

"All right. Come on," he said.

They moved down across the lawn. They passed his car, and crossed the wet street and stepped under the pines.

"There's a ditch here," Sarah said. "You'll have to help me across the ditch."

"Sure."

They moved gingerly down the side of the ditch until they stood near a three foot stream of water. She came close to him, touching him with her body.

"Can you jump?" he said.

She shook her head. "No."

There was an iridescence to the foggy night. Lights from far in the city bloomed in the fog and Sarah's face was quite plain. Everything was quite plain for a short distance. After that everything was obliterated by the fog.

"Here," he said, taking her hand. She squeezed up next to him and he took her waist in his hand. Abruptly, he bent down, placed one hand under her legs, the other along her shoulders and lifted her and stepped across the water and stood her up on the other bank.

"You're very strong," she said.

He didn't reply. They went up the bank and into the field. He turned and looked back. There was only the blooming fog and the dripping from the sky.

"It seems foolish," he said.

"Does it?"

He shouted Art's name loudly.

Sarah moved into the field. He walked behind her. The blue dress and the blonde hair and the white arms and legs were very plain against the fog. Her dress clung to her damply and perspiration coated Bill's face. He called again.

"Whatever would he come in here for?" she said softly.

He came up to her side. They walked together, silently. They moved down small hummocks into damp ground and up and over low hills. They passed trees and Bill called repeatedly.

Sarah stopped and turned and looked up at him.

"Where could he have gone?"

Bill shook his head. He stared at her. She was breathing hard, and the third button on her dress was undone, her dress flaring open. She stared at him and then she half-smiled.

"It's terrible, asking you to do all this."

"It's all right."

"It's so hot!" she said. She squeezed her hair back away from her head with both hands, watching him. She smiled at him, her teeth tight together, glistening. The moon

was up there someplace. "I'd like to just take my dress right off," she said. She kept watching him, smiling. She released her hair, leaned down and pulled up the skirt of her dress. She brought it up to her hips and tied one side of it into a big knot on her left hip. "You don't mind, do you?"

He didn't say anything.

She rubbed her legs with her hands, watching him closely.

It was very quiet. Water dripped softly, steadily from nowhere and the fog drifted.

"What would I have done if you hadn't come by?" she said.

"I don't know." He spoke quickly. He looked away into the fog, scowling. Then he looked at her. She smiled at him, squeezing the knot of blue cloth at her hip above the full white columns of her legs.

They stood there watching each other.

"I don't think he's in here," Bill said.

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Maybe you're right," she said.

They breathed together, staring. Neither moved. They stood perfectly still, staring. Then she began to slowly rub her legs with her palms again, watching him steadily.

He made a vicious sound in his throat and grabbed her brutally. She cried out, her hands clawing at his shoulders. He fastened his fingers into her dress and ripped it savagely, tearing it away from her.

She clung to him frantically as they dropped to the ground, and lay back, her face very white, pale hair fanned out around her head on the wet grass. The night was loud with violence.

Finally, hunched beside her, his fingers still snarled in the torn folds of her dress, breathing with profound heaviness, he stared down at her fixed grin. Her upper lip rolled redly away from her teeth, eyes wide and steady.

"Art never came out here, did he?"

She shook her head, watching him.

"Why didn't we stay in the house, Sarah?"

She said nothing. He took her wrists, pulled her half up.

"It's all right now," she said,

staring. "I don't care any more." Her voice was curiously flat. "We fought all the time, he wouldn't give me any money. Kept me locked in the house when he was away. Said I was no good — told the neighbors that." Her voice took on a slight edge. "I couldn't stand it, Bill! I *had* to have someone. When I saw you . . . well, after all I'm human!"

"Where is Art?"

"Back at the house. I killed him — in bed. Just before I called you. I used a knife." Her eyes were defiant now. "I planned it for a long time. It's all right now."

He let go of her and stood up. She sprawled back on the tattered blue cotton dress, looking up at him. It began to rain softly through the fog.



Arraignment Waved

In Dayton, O., Mrs. Lou Jones, 22, was being arraigned in municipal court on a charge of bigamy. "Did you do it?" asked Judge Cecil E. Edwards.

"Well, I guess I did," Mrs. Jones replied.

"Do you want to waive the grand jury?" the judge continued.

Without replying, Mrs. Jones turned her back to the judge, raised her arm and waved several times at the spectators.

Delayed Revenge

There's a unidentified book salesman in Fort Worth, Tex., who never forgets. Mrs. May Cooper told police that two years ago she clouted the persistent salesman with a rolling pin to get rid of him. Recently, she continued, the same young man rang her bell, walked in past her, picked up her rolling pin and bopped her with it.

Marty

HE HAD been standing there nearly fifteen minutes, deep in the shadows of a doorway, directly across the street from the apartment building. He was watching the two windows on the second floor. It was Saturday night and almost nine o'clock, but he knew she was there. And he knew she was alone.

For the tenth time he brought his wrist up to within a few inches of his face to look at his watch again. Then he took a deep pull on his cigarette and snapped the butt into the street.

He stepped out of the darkness and stood



Joe was a big man, and he could take Marty apart if he wanted to. But Joe wasn't home, and his wife was a beautiful woman.

BY

ROBERT S. SWENSON

for a moment on the sidewalk looking up again to the two yellow squares of light on the second floor. Then he walked across the street and into the building.

As he walked up to her door on the second floor he could hear her moving about inside, and he could hear her humming something soft. He stood listening to her for a long moment with his ear cocked toward the door. Then he knocked three times. They were soft, light taps, intimate and self-assured.

From inside the apartment his knocking was received with a sudden silence, and then, after a long pause, he could hear faintly within the room the hiss of slippered feet moving across the floor. The feet stopped at the door and again there was silence.

The man looked down and saw under the door the thin crack of light broken by the shadow of her feet. He reacted faintly with a smile, and he knocked three times again. This time the knob turned slowly and the door opened part way.

"Marty!"

The word was sucked in with her breath. She pulled the door open wide and stared at him. Her mouth fell open slightly and her eyes, like bright blue agates, registered, not fear, but the extreme in incredulosity.

She was young, remarkably blonde, and she wore a faded blue housecoat, worn and washed almost to whiteness. She had the coat

pulled tightly around her body and in such a way that it left no doubt that her body was beautiful. It left no doubt of her nakedness underneath.

Marty acknowledged her greeting with a slight nod of his head, and with exceptional self-assurance he walked past her into the room.

She closed the door and with her hands flat behind her, she leaned back against it. The initial shock of seeing him was fading and there was the beginning of anger now in her eyes. She watched Marty as he made a short tour of inspection of the one room apartment.

At the far side of the room he stopped and stood in front of the big double bed that was pushed up against the wall. There was a six-months-old baby in the bed, and Marty watched it for a moment as it slept. Then he sat down on the bed.

He took a wooden match and a cigarette from his pocket and, leaning back across the bed, he scratched the match along the iron bedpost and lit his cigarette. He flicked the match onto the floor, took a deep drag, and blew the smoke into the room.

"Somehow I thought you'd done better than this, Eva," he said.

She stared at him breathing deep controlled breaths. Then she spun around and gave the key a vicious twist in the lock. She dropped the key into the pocket of her housecoat, turned, and walked a few steps

toward Marty.

"If Joe ever found you here he'd kill you," she said.

Marty laughed. "Take it easy, baby. Nobody's going to find me here. Joe doesn't get in until 11:20, and it's only nine o'clock. I know all about Joe. I know every move he makes for every minute of the day. Why, honey, I even know —"

"You haven't changed," she said. She took a step toward him again and stood behind the metal kitchen chair. She squeezed the back of it with a grip that would have splintered a lesser thing. "Still the same old Marty. Still got everything figured out, haven't you?"

He rolled over on the bed and propped himself up with his elbow. "And still the same sweet little Eva," he said. He was smiling at her. "I see marriage hasn't changed you any. In fact, I think it's done you good."

She moved toward him now with her clenched fists pressed into her thighs. "I mean it, Marty," she said. "You'd better not let Joe catch you here. He's a big man, Marty, and he's strong. Six feet four in his stockings and with an arm as fat as a watermelon. And you should see his hands. They're like baseball gloves. He could twist your head off just as easy as he'd twist the cover off a jar of mustard. And he'd do it. You don't know him like I do, Marty. He'd kill you if he ever found you here."

"I know him *better* than you do,

Eva. He'd kill us *both* if he ever found me here." Marty laughed again. "Aw, take it easy, honey. Nobody's going to find me here. It's only nine o'clock."

He sat up on the edge of the bed and reached his hand toward her. "Come here, baby," he said soothingly. "This is your old Marty. Remember? It's like old times."

"Old times!" She walked up to Marty and stood over him pointing her fist at the baby in the bed. "There's your old times," she said. "Sweet, innocent, little Eva. I actually believed you, Marty. Everything you said."

She looked at the baby and, as she did this, the tenseness began to drain out of her body. "He was six months in me the last time I saw you," she went on softly. "Six months, Marty. I could have killed you."

Marty squirmed slightly. "Aw, Evie, baby. That's a long time ago. You're not still mad at your old Marty, are you? Why, you never had it so good. You've got a guy that's as steady as a rock. And as for the kid — what was the matter with Joe? He had money."

"It was too late, Marty. Anyway, he didn't want it that way. He loves me, Marty. He wanted me and he wanted the kid. You wouldn't understand."

Marty looked up at her when she said this and there was amusement faintly evident at the corners of his lips. "Do you, Eva?" he asked. "Do

you understand?"

She didn't answer him. She just stood there in front of him looking down at him. And when she didn't answer, it made Marty smile again. He reached out his hand and grabbed her by the arm, pulling her down onto the bed.

"You're rotten, Marty" she said. "You're stinking, filthy garbage."

He put his arms around her and kissed her throat. "Remember what you used to say about me, Evie? Remember?" He tried to kiss her on the mouth but she turned her head away.

"Garbage," she said. Her breath was trembling.

"You've missed me, haven't you, Evie? I can tell. There was nobody like you and me."

"Stinking, filthy garbage." It was a whisper.

"Yeah," Marty said. "You and me, baby. Stinking, filthy garbage."

He found her mouth and he crushed his lips against hers, and her resistance, feeble at its best, evaporated.

When she awoke, she came out of her sleep slowly, and she lay in the bed with her eyes closed listening to the baby's soft breathing. For a long time she didn't move, and then suddenly she came to life. She ripped the sheet off her body and sat bolt upright in the bed.

"Marty!" she called.

He was over by the sink combing

his hair in front of the mirror. He looked back at her. "It's after eleven," he said.

She took a deep breath and relaxed again, and for a moment she watched Marty as he combed his hair. Then she swung her legs around and sat on the edge of the bed.

She stretched out her leg and hooked her toe under her housecoat. It was on the floor a few feet in front of her. She pulled it toward her until she could reach it, and then she picked it up and stood in front of the bed. She pushed her arms into the sleeves and then wrapped the gown tightly around her body.

She walked over to where Marty was, and standing behind him, she pressed herself against him, putting her arms around his chest and resting her head against his shoulder.

"Baby, it's after eleven," he said.

"It's still early. He doesn't get in until nearly eleven-thirty."

He turned and faced her and she put her arms around his neck.

"He gets in at eleven-twenty give or take exactly one minute. You're married to a clock, baby."

She pulled his head down until her lips were on his and in a moment she found the co-operation she was looking for.

The silence they had created was broken finally by the dull, muffled thud of the downstairs door. They broke apart instantly and stood listening. They could hear the distant, heavy tread of feet coming up the stairs.

Marty pushed Eva away from him and looked at his watch. Immediately he went gray with fear. "It's Joe," he said. "It's almost eleven-twenty." He sprinted to the door of the apartment and pulled at the knob, but the door didn't open. He began yanking furiously and pulling at the door with both hands but still the door didn't open.

He spun around and faced Eva. "Eva, it's locked!"

They could hear the steps clearly now. A slow, heavy pounding already beyond the first landing. It started Marty trembling violently, and, almost crazy with fear, he began yanking at the door again.

"Eva," he pleaded. He turned back to her. "Eva, give me the . . ." But he didn't finish. His words

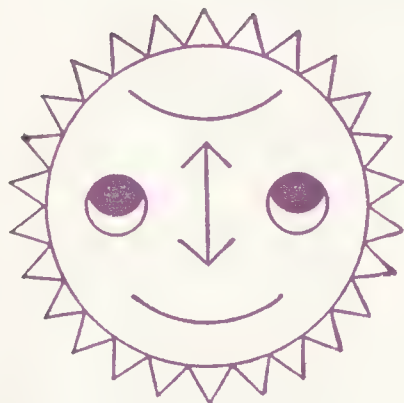
faded off into nothing and he just stood there, trembling, and staring at Eva.

She was laughing.

It was a quiet, vicious laughter, and Marty just stood there watching her. He watched her as she reached up and grabbed the frayed collar of her housecoat. With one quick motion she ripped down on the coat, tearing the old cloth of her gown like it was wet paper. It left one whole side of her naked to the waist.

They could hear the footsteps now at the head of the stairs in the second floor hallway. It was a heavy powerful step, and Eva was still laughing. She was still laughing when she reached into her pocket and took out the key. She tossed it to Marty and he caught it.

And then Eva began to scream.



LET'S LOOK AT THE BRIGHTER SIDE

Many thousands of Americans are cured of cancer every year. More and more people are going to their doctors *in time*...To learn how to head off cancer, call the American Cancer Society or write to "Cancer" in care of your local Post Office.

American Cancer Society



RAIN's tapping on the window. The house is quiet, nobody awake.

I keep watching the window. It's dark outside. Only a little while now. I wait, lay quiet and light a cigarette. Me, I cool it when I do a job. That's the only way. Play it smart straight through and you don't get caught, you don't have to answer questions.

I been in the house since ten o'clock like a real chump. Eleven

o'clock I hit the bed. For me, that ain't hardly natural around here, but I got my excuse set for Moms before she asks what's wrong.

There ain't nothing wrong, I told her, except I'm tired from too much stickball. That's enough to set her mind at rest, she don't say no more.

Okay, it's a long wait till twelve-thirty, and I don't even read. It's best to keep the light out. I can think like that. That's one thing about me. I'm not like the rest of the

Cool Cat

"Those other cats, they're just stupid. It takes brains to set up a good deal like mine — a good, safe deal . . ."

A Novelette

BY HAL ELLSON



bunch. They're all kind of stupid. Especially Twist.

That boy thinks he's king and he ain't nothing. What's he got but muscles? I got the brain, I'm the real wheel of the bunch but he don't know it. None of them chumps do. They don't know nothing. All around, that's better for me.

Waiting is long, and then it's gone. I light a match, look at my watch. Yeah, it's twenty after twelve.

Don't have to dress. I'm ready to breeze. Be quiet, that's all. It don't take nothing else to get out of the house, but I ain't taking chances.

The window's always best. I go to it, ease it up, let myself out on the fire escape. Man, it's raining sixty. I head for the roof and come down the stairs soft so nobody hears nothing.

Got to run when I hit the door. I cut for Twist's cellar. That's the meeting place.

They waiting on me when I come in. Old ugly-face Twist got a bad look on his puss. The others is blasé-like, playing it cool.

"Cookie, I thought you wasn't coming," Twist tells me.

I look back at him like his words don't mean nothing, like he can't bug me at all. That's to bug him.

"You see me here, don't you?" I say. "I'm on time, ain't I? I'm never behind."

Man, he don't like that. The others is digging this. Peaches is grinning, so is Jimmy. Even Jeff, and Jeff is Twist's boy.

No more is said. Twist looks at the door, gives the word. We start moving.

It ain't raining so hard when we come up from the cellar. The streets is dark, quiet. Four blocks to walk.

It seems long. But when we reach there I can't remember walking. Seems like a minute ago we was in the meeting place.

Now we're ready. That candy store across the street is still open. I know it like my own room, know the guy who owns it, what he does. I know him better than he knows himself.

That's my job. I line up all the jobs for the gang cause I'm a cool cat. I always play it cool and they know it. If it wasn't for me, they couldn't knock off nothing.

But the others is scared of Twist. Me and him never did get along cause he knows who's got the brain, who's the real leader of the gang. Yeah, after tonight the whole world is going to know.

"Okay, let's move," Twist says.

I look at him. One thing I got to say, he ain't afraid. Nothing scares him. He's got that look in his eye like a dead man, nothing on his face.

We hit that candy store door, come in like it's afternoon. The old man behind the counter looks up, makes a bad face.

It's been a bad night and he's ready to breeze. Tough on him. We hit the stools. I can see he don't want no part of us. That figures, but he's got to do like we say.

"A vanilla malted," Twist tells him, "and don't be stingy with the ice cream."

Man, that kills the old guy. He gives us another bad look. But he starts fixing the malted. I give Jeff the nod. He moves to the jukebox, drops a coin in.

Like I figured, the old guy starts to blow his lid. It's late and he's ready to close. He don't want no music.

That's the cue for Jeff. He gives the old guy back lip. At the same time Twist gets up and moves to the door, slips behind the counter. To make it real cool I get into the argument with the old man.

Twist is moving up behind the counter. This is it. A disc slides on in the juke. Music crashes out and Twist moves like lightning. He's on the old guy, but something happens.

A door opens in back of the store and a big popeyed crazy-looking motherjumper comes flying out.

Nobody has to yell. We hit for the door, scatter quick. It's everybody for himself and I'm out first running like the wind.

Turning the corner, I look back. There's nothing to be seen, nobody after me. I keep running.

Ten minutes later I'm back at the meeting place in Twist's cellar. I'm first there.

I take a smoke and wait it out. A minute later Peaches comes in. He's followed by Jeff. Jimmy is next. That leaves Twist.

We wait it out. Nobody's talking.

Nobody's in a good mood. I see them others looking at me, know what they thinking. Twist is caught. Cops got him. They might beat him into talking and haul us all in.

2.

It don't happen that way. The cellar door swings open and Twist walks in.

Man, he's a sad-looking cat. His jacket is torn and he got a lump on his eye big as an egg.

"Man, what's happened?" Jeff says. "I thought they got you this time."

"Got nothing. I'm here, thanks to nobody."

"That guy nailed you, didn't he?"

"Behind the counter. I was trapped behind it and had to fight my way out."

"That pretty jacket is ripped bad. You see your eye?"

"No, but I feel it. He got me a good one."

"How'd you bust out, Twist?"

"I got him better than he got me. Damn, we was whaling. He flung me on top of the counter and that's when I got him. My hand just naturally picked up a jar and I busted it over his head."

"What about the old man?"

"He was out. I got him right off."

Jeff smiles, nods his head. "If it was one of us, the cops be beating on us now."

Twist shrugs that off. He ain't smiling. The room goes quiet.

There's a bad look on Twist's face when he turns to me.

"Something wrong?" I say to him.

"Yeah, you don't know what? Man, that was your own set-up. You told us it was an easy knock-over, and what happens? I almost had it."

"We almost had it, that's what you mean."

"Cause of you. You supposed to be smart, and you ain't got a brain cell in your head."

"Being I'm so stupid, why you got to follow?" I say to Twist.

He's ready to bust on that. He takes a step, stops and keeps looking at me. I'm jumpy but I don't show nothing. At least my answer stops him, and he cools.

"Okay, tell me how that guy happened to be back of the store?" he says.

"Ask Houdini. I ain't so good at guessing."

"You had the job lined up."

"Something went wrong."

"You telling me that? It could have been my skin."

"All of us," I tell him again. "It could have been all of us."

"Yeah, but I was the one behind the counter. It was my skin."

"Cause you was in the wrong spot."

"That's what I mean, Cookie. You got the idea."

"What you supposed to be saying?"

That old dog-face of Twist's is next to mine now. His eyes is small.

It's like he's ready to jump. I face him out. It's the only way, cause he can beat me.

That does it. He steps back, and everybody relaxes.

"That's better," Jeff tells him. "I thought you was going to clash."

Twist's grinning now. "Okay, man, let's forget it," he says. "I was hot cause of what happened. Give me five."

I give him my hand. That's all. We're friends again, the air is clear. I feel kind of good, like I can breathe.

All of us light up and relax. We don't talk about the job we messed up. It's history. Anything that happens ten minutes back is history.

"I'm missing that money we could have had," Jeff says. "Man, it's bad to be broke."

"If you didn't spend all your money on the broads, you'd be rich," Twist tells him. "And none of them is any good."

"You know any better ones than I do?"

"That's beside the point. I don't feed them and pay the way. It's the other way around with me."

"Ida tells me different," Jeff says.

"She tells everybody different. That girl's got a hole in her head. She don't look out, I'm going to put a hole in her heart."

Jeff grins on that, snuffs his butt. "We're talking when we could be doing. The night is young yet. Who's for a little mugging? The bartenders be throwing the drunk men in the gutter soon."

Peaches and Jimmy don't say nothing to that. They look at Twist. He's the big cheese. We all wait for him.

He yawns and says, "The fact is I could use a little change."

He looks at Peaches and Jimmy, then at me. "You ain't in?"

"Did I say I ain't?"

"Nobody's saying you got to come. The split is bigger with less people in on the kill."

He thinks he's going to talk me out, but he's got the wrong cat. "I'm in all the way," I tell him. "Less you figure you don't want me for no more jobs."

That does it, cause he knows I'm the brain and he ain't nothing without me. They all know that.

"Okay, you're in," he says.

That's the signal. We get up and move to the cellar door. Damn, outside a flood is falling, rain beating on the pavement. We stand in the area-way and look out.

"Ain't nobody walking in the streets in that," Jeff says. "And I ain't in the mood for drowning."

We move back to the cellar, and the cards come out. There ain't nothing else to do but play and wait.

We do that, quit an hour later and look out again. The rain is stopping, but nobody's in the mood for a mugging now.

We hit the pavement and split for the night. Halfway home buckets is falling again. I sprint for the house.

It's dead silent when I go up the

stairs. Seems like nobody's awake. I reach the roof and head for the fire escape, come down it and open the window.

It's good to stretch between the sheets. The window is open a little, rain tapping on it, a funky old smell comes drifting in from the river. Yeah, that's perfumed garbage, but who cares? I'm tired, ready to sleep and I can't. I lay flat for a long time, thinking of old ugly-face Twist. He's dumb, he don't know nothing about tonight, cause that's the way I planned it. None of them knowed that guy was back of the store but me. I had it all figured with Twist back of the counter. He had to get caught, but something went wrong.

Next time it's going to be different. I'll fix it good for him so he won't be around for a long time.

The rain's stopping. There ain't nothing now. Seems like the whole city is sleeping. I close my eyes and go off.

3.

Next day I'm up late. I dress fast and look out the window. Little kids is playing around, the street looks clean, like somebody swept it. That's a lie. The rain did that. So what? By tonight it'll be like the garbage men was through, dumping stuff and junk all over.

Two seconds later I'm out the door. When I hit the street nothing's happening around, but that figures. I breeze over to Suzie's. She's sweet-

pie, the kind I like cause she don't play the field.

There's just two guys in her life, and both of them is me. I hit on her door like the landlord coming for rent.

She opens and I push in, move to the parlor, flop on the couch.

Suzie follows me in. Got a bad look on her face. She don't have to say. I know what's wrong and I wait to see what she got to say, how she going to put it this time.

She don't say nothing so I ask her who died, where should I send the flowers.

That don't go. She stays mad-looking so I call her on it.

"Baby, what's wrong?" I say. "Don't I belong no more, or should I pack to go?"

What I like about her is the way I can twist her. She's got a scared look. I make a move like I'm shoving off for good, do it cool.

Next thing she's on the couch with me. "I ain't mad with you," she tells me. "But you wasn't around last night. I waited for you, I couldn't sleep when I didn't see you."

"I had business," I tell her. "Otherwise, you know I'd be seeing you."

"What kind of business?"

"My business."

"Was you with Twist?"

"How'd you guess?"

"When you ain't with me, you always with him and the boys."

"Something wrong with that?"

She don't answer so I ask again.

She still don't want to say, so I take her hand, bend it back against her arm. Yeah, now she talk Chinese, any language I want to hear.

"What's wrong about being with Twist, Suzie?"

"Nothing."

"Girl, that's a fabricated lie," I say but I let her go. She's looking at me half-angry. It's a kind of sweet look she got, with her big eyes almost ready for tears. It makes my spine feel like butter.

"I hurt you, baby?"

"Yeah, what you think?"

"I was only playing with your hand."

"You near to broke it."

"Cause you lied, girl. That's one thing I ain't for. You don't have to lie to me."

"I wasn't lying."

"That's a lie on top of the first one. You ever hear of double jeopardy? Girl, that's what you in when you play words with me."

She's near to tears, scared like I'm going to tear her skin off. I don't like to do this, but it's a good feeling I get, like I own her soul.

She's rubbing her hand now. That's for sympathy. But I ain't ready to dish no soft stuff out. It's a bit too early.

"You remember Tiny?" I say.

She nods on that.

"Maybe you heard and maybe you didn't. Maybe you got the lie, but this is the truth, why I busted with her. That girl got big ideas, her nose was in business territory

strictly my own. I beat her for that, and I mean beat. She wasn't around on the scene for a week."

Suzie's looking at the floor. She scared as hell, but playing with her hand. Got on a big pout, moving her toe in the carpet like a little girl.

I put the last on her. "You got anything to say now?"

"No."

"Got anything to ask?"

"No."

"You don't know no other word but no?"

Her face comes around slow and she gives me a deep look like she's thinking what I'm meaning. That's the way I planned it. Beat them down, make them scared of you, and you got them, you got everything.

"You asked me a question," she said. "I answered it best I could, Cookie."

"Oh, so you know my name?"

"If I don't, who does?" she says, pushing more.

Them words is sweet to my ear. Yeah, she's purring now. Got that look in her eyes like she's loving me forever. If I said crawl, she'd crawl on the floor. If I said jump, she'd jump off the roof. I give her a little smile and she melts like a hunk of ice.

"I hurt your hand?" I say. I know I did, but that's to test for the reaction.

She's goofed, don't know what to say cause she's still scared.

"You got no tongue, Suzie?"

"It don't really hurt."

"Damn, girl, you lying to me again?"

Her eyes pop. She ain't expecting that. I act like I'm going to split her in half and she starts shaking.

Real tears come to her eyes. I grab her, pull her close.

"Forget it," I say. "I wasn't meaning nothing."

She keeps her face down, don't answer, so I take her hand.

"It's hurting, ain't it?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I didn't mean that," I tell her. That's a lie, but she laps it up like buttermilk. Them tears is finished and she's smiling again. I kiss her hand soft and tell her that's to make it better.

The line is a charm. I feed her some more soft-talk, shovel it out by the bushel till her eyes is all love for me.

She's easy as pudding now, but it's kind of hot and there's plenty of time. There's all afternoon and an empty house. I give her a kiss and her mouth wants to eat me.

But like I say, there's time, so I push her away easy and light me a cigarette, stretch my legs good and say, "How's the icebox doing, Suzie? Your Pops leave any beer for me, or did he drink it all by himself again?"

I know she don't like that. It's in her eyes but she says, "I don't know, I didn't look."

"Then look, girl. I got a dry tongue. You can bring me a can if it's real cold."

That's an order and she knows it, she can't refuse. Her butt is up off that couch in no time. I watch her go for the kitchen, watch the way she walks.

It don't take a half minute and she's back with a glass. I take a good drink and blow my breath.

Then I say, "You ain't having none?"

She makes a face on that cause she don't like beer. She don't drink at all. It's what I like about her. She ain't no slobber-lips jiving girl that goes drunk on foam.

I don't tell her that cause she might get a big head and I'd have to slap it off. I'm in the mood for fun so I say, "You better get a glass for yourself."

She shakes her head, tells me she don't want none.

Yeah, I lay it on heavy now and she's got to react. There ain't no way out. I start the ball rolling by shoving my glass in her hand. "Take a sip.

She takes that sip and makes a face. I snatch the glass and laugh.

"It ain't killing," I say. "How does it taste?"

"It don't taste like nothing much."

"Cause you only had a sip. Get yourself a full glass and sit by me. Turn on the player and we'll listen to some records."

She don't move till I raise my voice. Then she jumps, goes to the kitchen and comes back. She throws some records on, starts the player.

It's down real soft so nobody can hear but us, so nobody knows we're here together.

There's all day ahead, miles of time. We empty the glasses and I send her for a refill. One is enough for her. Got a dizzy look in her eye and her legs don't work right on them high heels.

I finish half the glass, put it aside and grab her. Yeah, she's like real butter melting. I'm on her lips and she don't fight like she usually do. I got a green light this time. There ain't no talking cause there's nothing to talk about. Words is beside the point. I don't even hear the music no more. There's nothing now but us.

4.

Later I hear words in my ear, somebody talking. I'm half asleep and don't want to be bothered. But I hear her again, telling me it's late and I got to go.

I open my eyes and Suzie floats away, stands up. Got a nice smile, a shiny face, her hair up in a knot.

"I don't want you to but you got to go," she tells me. "It's real late."

That's no lie and I'm up on my feet. The room looks different, the glasses is gone. I feel dirty and sweaty looking at Suzie. That shiny face is like a star.

I tell her that and she laughs. Plus that, she says she had herself a shower. I can smell that sweet powder in my brain.

I move toward her. This time she ain't no melted butter. She holds me off, but she's smiling nice.

"We can't fool around, you got to go," she says. "Moms'll be here soon."

I cool fast on that. You never spoil a good thing when you can save it for the next time. So I don't press the matter.

I'm ready to swing. We move to the door. A little last kiss don't matter. I peck her lips, and then she ain't letting me go. Got her arms around me tight.

"Cookie, be careful," she says, real serious.

"About what?"

"You know what."

"You objecting to my friends?"

"I don't like Twist."

"He ain't my friend."

"Then why do you be with him?"

"Cause he's in the same club."

"He's bad influence. I know about him."

I laughed on that. "In my life he ain't even a four-legged fly with no head. He don't mean nothing."

"You couldn't stay way from him — for me?"

"I ain't with him. It's the other way around. He's with me but he don't know it cause he's too stupid."

"Then how come you do what he says?"

"Girl, who told you that punky jive?"

"I heard with my ears."

"Then you heard wrong, cause he does what I say. They all do what

I say, but I play it cool from behind the scene. The others don't even know the happenings."

"You could be in trouble."

"Yeah, somebody really been talking to you. Peaches' sister got a big mouth."

"She didn't tell me."

"It couldn't be nobody else, but don't you worry. I know the score all the way round."

I give her another peck on that and open the door. Going down the stairs, I'm thinking things. Got to talk to Peaches. His sister knows too much. Maybe he talks to her. Maybe she sees too much. Either way, he's got to shut her face.

First things first. That what Moms always says. So I hit for Peaches' house soon as I reach the street.

I catch him coming from the corner and he greets me good like he always does. He's one guy I like, my best friend, but that don't mean I got to forget to straighten him.

Right away he knows something's off. I'm not for beating around the bush so I let him have it when we reach his stoop.

"It's your sister," I say. "Plus you."

"Yeah?"

"That's right. How come she got a mouth bigger than her head?"

"What did she say to throw you, Cookie?"

"You ought to know better than me."

"I don't know what you're talking."

"Okay, so how does Suzie know so much if she don't talk to your sister?"

"I don't tell my sister nothing."

"Yeah, then how she know if you don't tell her?"

"You're asking the wrong cat, cause I don't know."

That don't go down with me and I don't let it. "You do know," I tell him. "Your sister picking up stuff she shouldn't know and spreading it around to Suzie. Maybe you said things you shouldn't say."

"Not that I know about."

"Okay, let it pass now and stop it cold for the future. Speak to Sister and tell her to keep shut. If she don't and she gets between me and Suzie, I'm going to slap her head off. You can tell her that for me."

I can see he don't like what I say and he gives me a kind of bad look, but he knows I'm right.

"Take care of it, Peaches," I tell him. "I leave her to you."

"Okay, man."

That's all. We slap hands, and I swing for home.

5.

After supper is a funny time. There's the usual argument with Moms, then I hit for the roof. It's good up there. Cool. A wind blowing off the river. I lay down and let it blow over me, light a butt and watch the sky.

It's starting to get a little dark. A

flock of pigeons swings overhead. I hear whistling. That's Zebra calling in his birds.

I'm kind of tired and my eyes is closed before I know it. When I open them again I hear mumbling. Somebody on the roof-landing.

I get up. The door is open. I tiptoe up next to it. Yeah, now I know. Two cats is arguing over stuff. They ready to shoot some H, but it's who goes first and who goes second. They arguing like somebody's going to lose real bad.

I slip back. One thing you never do is walk up on two addicts without them knowing.

I hit for the streets through another house and walk to the corner.

Nothing's happening so I quit the scene and leg it over to Peaches' house.

He's sitting on the stoop, puffing on a cigarette. Got a long face.

"What's happening, man?" I say. "Your puss is dragging on the sidewalk."

"Nothing much."

"Got anything on for tonight?"

"I'm waiting."

"For what?"

"Sister. I got some proving to do."

Sister comes down a few minutes later and gives me a big hello. Got a smile on her face but it don't last, cause I give her the cold treatment.

She starts down the stoop then, and Peaches stops her.

"We got some talking to do, all three of us," he says.

"What about?"

"It ain't too private here. We'll talk on the roof."

Sister's not for the idea, but Peaches tells her to start moving. She knows what she'll get so she moves and we go on up.

Soon as we're there, Peaches says, "Tell Cookie all I told you about him. Go ahead."

"What's wrong with you? You told me nothing I don't know."

"Then I didn't give nothing away?"

"What's there to give away?"

Peaches turns to me. "Okay, you heard," he says. "You satisfied now that I ain't no big-mouth?"

"Okay, man." I'm satisfied on him, but I ain't through with Sister. She's ready to go, but I'm blocking the doorway.

"I want a word with you," I tell her. "You been saying things to Suzie I don't like."

"Like what have I been saying?"

"Stuff that's none of your business. From this point on, you leave me out of your talking, see what I mean? You don't discuss me with Suzie."

"You telling me how to talk like you're my father."

"I'm giving you fair warning."

She laughs on that, and I'm ready to slap her. That ain't necessary, cause Peaches lets her have it full in the mouth.

Yeah, she ain't laughing now. She's ready to use her claws, and Peaches busts her again.

That's the finish. She ain't got no more fight. She's ready to cry.

"Next time it's going to be worse," he tells her. "Less you keep your mouth shut. Okay, now, you can go about your business."

There's no word out of her. I step aside. She don't look up. That's all there is to it. I listen to her go down the stairs and turn to Peaches.

He got a big smile. I smile back at him, tell him everything is straight and get set to go down when he stops me.

"I got something to tell you, Cookie," he says. "You want to listen?"

"Shoot."

We light up first. Then he tells me, "This is about Twist."

"Yeah."

"He ain't liking you, Cookie."

"It's both ways, Peaches. If a Mack truck ran four times over his skull, I'd laugh for a month."

"Okay, but you got to be careful with that stud. If you wasn't a real friend, I wouldn't be telling you this."

I look at him different now, there's a cold feeling inside me like ice-water is running in my blood. I got that something-wrong feeling that always tells me watch out for myself.

"What's so special?" I say.

He's looking away now, like he don't want to talk, like he's said too much and is scared to go on.

"Spill it, man," I tell him. "What

did you hear? How much do you know?"

"If I say, you don't let it go back to him?"

"Man, you know I'm shut. What's the deal?"

"Twist is suspicious."

"Yeah?" I say and I laugh, but it ain't a natural sound from my mouth. My blood is chilling more. "What's he suspicious about?"

"I didn't catch it all cause he was talking to Jeff. But I know he meant you. He going to catch and fry you."

"Thanks, man. I got two eyes in front and four in the back. Nobody's catching Cookie when he ain't looking."

"Good. You going down to the street?"

"I don't know. There's nothing special happening around, so what's the use?"

"There's nothing up here, either."

"It's cooler and there ain't no noise."

"Okay, I'm going to roll. There's a new girl around I got eyes for. Maybe she's on the sidewalk tonight."

That's all. We're finished and he goes for the door. I'm alone on the roof. It's real dark. Lights is way off in big buildings and across the river. There's nothing else but the sky, and I don't want to look up now cause it's a funny kind of dark.

There's nothing I want to do right now. I smoke a butt and think about what Peaches told me.

I'm blowing smoke and talking to myself when I hear steps on the stairs. They coming to the roof. Maybe dope addicts is on the way up. I'm not taking chances so I cut out for another roof and head for the street.

6.

Things is happening at the candy store when I breeze in. The crowd's there, a crazy record playing. Everybody's goofing off in the back, having a gay time.

I sit at the counter and have me a cool drink. A minute later Twist passes in back of me. Suzie is with him. They don't notice me, so I don't say nothing.

Them two together don't make sense. Something's wrong.

I sit it out and Suzie comes back in by herself. She still don't see me and goes to the rear. Sister's waiting at a table.

Both of them start out. I swing around on the stool, stop Suzie and she looks at me like she's ready to fall on her face. She covers that quick, gives me a nice greeting that fools nobody.

"You going out?" I say.

"Yeah, Cookie."

"Then I'll go with you."

The three of us go out to the sidewalk. Sister excuses herself fast. The two of us move on. We don't say nothing, but I'm watching her. She looks kind of pale, kind of nervous.

There's no exchanges till we reach her stoop. Then I tell her, "I didn't think you was friendly with old ugly-face."

"Who's ugly-face?"

"That's my pet name for Twist. Seems like you kind of favor him, don't it?"

Suzie looks at me scared and shakes her head. "You're thinking wrong."

"Then how come you was with him? Make it sound good for me so I don't get mad and bust your lip."

"Cookie, it's not what you're thinking. Honest, it ain't. He came back to the table where me and Sister was. He said he wanted to speak to me private outside."

"About what?"

"A date. He said he was liking me and would I like to go to a show with him some time. I told him no, I don't go with nobody but you."

"Just like that?"

"You don't believe me? Why you so suspicious?"

"Cause I'm liking you, and I don't trust him."

"You don't trust me, that's what you mean."

"I trust you all the way, baby. But I don't want you to be with him ever."

"I ain't going to be with him. Don't you understand?"

"Okay, I understand. Forget it. It's cause I like you so much that I don't want him around. There's only one thing he wants. That's to bust us up and show how big he is."

"He ain't nothing at all to me."

It's good hearing that. Yeah, she ain't for Twist. She ain't for nobody but me.

Everything's okay now. We move up, sit on the stoop. I'm thinking of the afternoon. It was the first time she didn't fight back, the best time. There wasn't no fussing about it.

I lean over and say, "Somebody's home upstairs?"

Suzie looks at me and knows right off what I'm meaning.

"Everybody's up," she tells me.

"That's real bad."

"Why?"

"Cause I'm feeling like this afternoon."

"You shouldn't say like that."

"Maybe not, but that's how I feel."

She turns her face away.

I reach out, get her wrist.

"Come on, Suzie."

"Where?"

"Upstairs near the clouds. There's nobody to bother us."

"You're crazy, Cookie."

I shake my head. Still got her hand. "Not me. I ain't crazy excepting about you."

I say that soft, but I keep my grip on her wrist, start squeezing.

"You're hurting me, Cookie."

"Yeah, I know."

"Let me go."

I shake my head. "You know when I'll let you go. Not before. You coming up?"

The fact is she wants to but she's

a little scared. That's kind of natural. I put the squeeze on a little more and say, "You know you can't refuse me. You know you're loving me so much you can't think of nothing else."

That does it. I see that look she gives me, feel her hand go soft in mine.

"All right, Cookie," she says. Her voice is real soft.

"Let's go," I say, and we both get up.

It's a long way to the roof. I'm hoping we don't meet nobody in her family. I can see Suzie's scared, biting her lip. Maybe she going to run out on me.

That's a lie. She goes all the way to the top and we hit the dark. Soon as we're on the tar, she turns and throws herself on me.

Man, this is something new. She's a real witch, wild as they come. That's okay by me. When they're wild it means they're tamed. She's kissing crazy. Man, it's like she been smoking pot, but I can handle it.

Got her arms around my neck. I take them away and say, "This ain't the spot. Somebody could come up and see us here."

We move away, pick a better place where it's safer, easier for me to run if I got to run. We ain't there half a second when she's got her arms around me, her mouth on mine.

Yeah, she's real frantic. It's the real thing, too. No wonder Twist was after this. He got a good eye.

But this is mine, all the way. He ain't ever going to have none of it.

7.

Half an hour later we're back down on the stoop. Suzie's different now. She don't say nothing. I keep talking at her and then she gets a crying fit.

I ain't expecting none of this, not so late in the game. I figure it's got to do with something I don't know about, so I ask her what's wrong.

It's like pulling teeth. Yeah, she's goofed up over nothing. Broads is all alike, made of pudding inside.

I finally get it out of her and it ain't nothing. She just wants me to take care of myself, that's all. She don't want me with the gang and all that kind of jive, just like you can walk in and out like you please.

I tell her the facts. Behind that, I say, "I know what I'm doing. Little Cookie can take care of himself."

"Then you ain't getting out of the gang?"

"I can't, plus the fact that I don't want to. Now let's drop it where we found it."

There's no more tears, nothing but a funny look that she throws me, then she gets up. I follow her into the vestibule for a good-night kiss.

It's a real long one, the best. Then she pulls away. "No matter what happens, remember that I'm always loving you," she says, and she leaves me standing there.

I smile to myself, go out, down the stoop, light up. Yeah, girls is goofy. What she got to say that for? It ain't sensible-like.

A couple of minutes later I cruise into the candy store. The usual crowd is there. I cop me a cool drink, see Peaches and give him a greeting. He's got on a long face.

"Whose funeral you going to?" I say.

That don't draw. He's looking at me funny. "Something's up," he tells me.

"Like what?"

"I don't exactly know, but I think you're in bad trouble."

"Let's stroll," I tell him, but we don't get to do that cause Jeff barges in.

He gives Peaches the nod and says, "You're wanted outside."

"Who wants to see me?"

"You don't know? Better get out fast, boy."

Peaches moves. Me and Jeff look at each other. Yeah, it's like he don't know me now. I don't like that look, but we never did like each other cause he's Twist's boy.

He follows Peaches outside. I wait around and then move on out. Peaches ain't around. Nobody's on the corner. Something's shaking. I don't know what, but I got a bad feeling, like this is got to do with me.

There's nothing to hold me so I hit for home. Peaches is on his stoop when I come along. I stop and ask him what's up.

He ain't the same cat now. Got a

funny look in his eye.

"Nothing," he says.

"What's between you and Twist?"

"Nothing."

"That was him that called you out, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"What did he have to say?"

"Nothing much. It was between him and me."

"Okay, man, I don't want to stick my nose in your affairs. But you was going to tell me something before Jeff called you out."

"Forget it."

"Didn't you say I was in bad trouble?"

"Forget it, man. It was nothing."

I see he ain't going to talk. There ain't no use standing around. I'm all right till I get to my stoop. Then it hits me hard. Things ain't straight. I'm thinking of what Suzie told me, how that Jeff boy looked at me.

8.

Next day I'm in no mood for the regular routine. I don't want to see nobody.

I hit a show by myself and that don't help, cause I'm kind of scared. That Twist is no one to play with.

I wish I was out of it, but there ain't no way out. I got to play it straight through. Can't hide cause there's no place to hide. Behind that, if I stay off the scene Twist is going to get ideas. He's going to think I'm scared, going to really think I pulled a fast one on him.

Night time I'm back at the candy store like usual. Everything's kind of the same. I see the boys and they're all right. Except Twist and Jeff. Old ugly-face and his boy is looking evil, but that ain't new with them. The only guy I can't figure is Peaches. Suddenly he's cold potato salad.

I see Suzie the next night. We're the same till she brings up the facts about a party in the neighborhood.

I'd heard tell about it but didn't figure on going. Least of all, I didn't think Suzie wanted to be there.

I ask her how she know about the party and she says Sister told her.

"Yeah, old trap-mouth. That one talk you blind."

"You don't want to take me?"

"What for?"

"Cause I'd like to go with you."

"It ain't your kind of party. Things'll be rough. They going to be drinking and smoking pot."

"So what? That don't mean I have to do like they do. Ain't you going to take me, Cookie?"

"You can talk a mile high and the answer is no."

"Yeah, you're afraid to take me cause of Twist. That's what you're thinking."

"Ugly-face don't scare me. Nobody does."

"Sister told me different. She says you wouldn't take me cause of him. She said . . ."

"Yeah, Sister!" I yell that out, and I'm ready to slap her down.

I don't. "Okay," I tell her, "you

want to see what's doing, then I'll take you."

She kisses me on that and it's set, but I got to dress for the session.

I fly home and come back in no time. I'm wearing my charcoal suit, wing-tip shoes, tab collar, blue tie, pink shirt.

Suzie's dressed pretty too. Got on pretty kicks, a pretty dress, her hair combed. I look her over, give her the nod.

"Nobody there is going to be prettier than you," I tell her.

She gives me a kiss on that and we cut the scene, take off for the party. By this time I'm in the mood.

We get there among the last, but that's okay. The party's really busting out when we cruise in. Yeah, everybody's got eyes for Suzie. She's the belle. Old Twist's eyes pop like an alligator's. We get a real old-time welcome.

A record is playing, the lights is dim, drinks going around. I smell pot in the air. That's not for me, not for Suzie.

We dance, and I'm glad we came now. Everything's okay. It's a good party, real cool, no rough stuff. Everybody's coasting nice.

I hold Suzie tighter, feel her head on my shoulder and close my eyes. It's like ten years till the record goes off.

A little later I walk into the kitchen for a beer. Drinks is all over the place, anything you want. I take some beer and somebody's behind me. It's old ugly-face.

We look at each other and I see him grin.

"Good party, ain't it, Cookie?"

"Yeah, not bad."

"You got your pretty broad with you. How'd you manage that? I didn't think she'd like to come."

"Where I go, she goes."

He laughs on that. "You're a cool cat," he says. "I got to hand it to you."

"You can say that again."

"Been meaning to tell you something, Cookie. Them words I used on you the night we pulled the job, I'm taking them back. I was off my rocker."

That's a weight off me, good to hear. "Forget it, man," I tell him. "It didn't mean nothing."

"Good. Give me some skin."

We touch hands and laugh.

"Somebody missing tonight. Who is it?" I say.

"Peaches." Twist ain't laughing no more. "I been meaning to tell you," he says.

"Tell me what?"

"Peaches put that guy on me when we pulled the job on the candy store."

I'm knocked dead on that, cause it's a lie. Cause I'm the one who made that set-up. I shake my head. It don't figure, that's what I tell him.

"It was Peaches," Twist says. "He knew the guy was in back of the store."

"If he knowed that, why did he come along when it could have

been his own neck?"

"I'll tell you why. Cause he was sure to get away. He figured I'd be bagged behind the counter like it almost happened."

"That still don't make sense if he was with us."

"It do, cause he knows I wouldn't talk if the cops got me. But why you sticking up for him?"

He's got me on that. But Peaches didn't do it. It's one thing I know. He ain't been talking to me, but he's the best in the bunch. Been ducking me, but the way I figure he's still my friend and I don't want them to put this on him.

Twist is waiting for the answer, looking at me. He asks me again why I'm sticking up for Peaches.

"Cause I know he didn't do it," I tell him back. "On top of that, he's my friend."

Twist is looking at me with that blank face, them dead eyes he has when he's mad.

"Okay," he says, "you got proof he didn't do it?"

I'm stopped again, can't say nothing but I got to say. "I happen to know," I tell him. "It ain't his style, that's all."

Twist nods like he's believing that, but he ain't. His face stays the same. He looks at me with them dead eyes.

"Okay, for the time being we'll let the first pass. You say he's your friend?"

"That's right."

"Yeah, but how do you really

know if he's your friend? What's the proof?"

Seems like crazy questions he's putting at me, but I'm wondering now. Twist ain't asking them for nothing. He got something up his sleeve, and I got a cold feeling like a wind is blow on me and there ain't no wind.

"Yeah, what's the proof?" he says. "Tell me, man."

I shrug. That uneasy feeling is still on me. "You don't prove something like that on paper. You just know it when it's so," I tell him.

Twist gives me a grin on that and shakes his head. "I got news for you, boy. Your theory is out, cause your friend ain't your friend."

"What you meaning?"

"Just like I say. He ain't your friend like you think. That's a fairy story all around. Better wake up, cause he's done put a knife in your back."

"How you figure that?"

"It didn't take no figuring. That's a fact, cause he already put it all on you."

I go dead cold on them words, but I don't say nothing. Got to cool it, keep my head. Something wrong here. Twist is trying to spring a trap.

"How you know all this?" I ask him.

"Only one way, man. He came to me and told. He swore on his mother."

I'm froze now. Sweat's trickling out of a million holes in my skin. I look at Twist. That face don't

show nothing. His eyes show nothing.

"What did he swear?"

"Man, do I have to spell it all out? He put it on you. He told me you knew about that guy in back of the store and wanted me caught."

I got a sick feeling, but I have to play this out, keep it cool. I try to smile.

"But you didn't believe that," I say.

"Nay, man, I knew he was putting it on you to take it off himself. Now you know what kind of a friend he is."

I nod, but this don't make sense. Something's wrong. Twist is wrong, cause no matter what Peaches said about me, he didn't know about that guy in back of the store and he didn't try to get Twist busted. That was my idea.

I look at Twist and he says, "You don't seem so happy. What's wrong, man? You don't believe what I told?"

"Yeah, I believe it now. But I didn't think he'd do something like that to me."

"Now you know."

"You going to work him over?"

"That's putting it mild. When I'm done with him he won't know his own face."

I look back at Twist, see that ugly face. Yeah, he means real business and I'm glad it's Peaches instead of me. The hell with him now. I don't care no more. He made

that up to put me on the spot. Now it's his skin.

Suzie busts into the kitchen looking for me. She gets my arm and I feel her nails in my skin.

"Something wrong?" I say.

"No, I was just wondering where you was. You was gone so long."

"I been talking business, that's all. But I'm with you now. You want to taste a little beer?"

I push my glass out and she pulls away. Me and Twist laugh on that.

"That's all right, though," Twist says. "Damn, some of them broads inside could empty a hogshead without blinking. They all going to end up bums in the street."

"Suzie is different," I say.

"Yeah, I know."

We move inside then. Next thing Twist is asking do I mind if he dance with Suzie. He says it all right so I can't refuse.

"Okay," I tell him, "but don't forget who she belong to."

"Yeah, I know. It's your property, man. I won't cut in. This is just a dance."

He's got her then. They swing out on the floor and I sip my beer and watch just in case he going to try some funny stuff.

He don't, and the record slides away. Suzie comes back to me and we sit the next one out. It's still a good party. There's no fights and nobody blows his top. I'm feeling all right again, not sweating no more cold sweat. I'm in the clear.

There's only one trouble. Suzie's

so stiff it ain't funny. It's like she's scared, but that's cause she's new for this. Some of the stuff she's seeing don't go now. Some of the other bitches getting a little wild. Yeah, let her wait a while. She ain't seen nothing yet.

I'm thinking like that when Jeff busts into the house. He finds Twist and they go into conference. Something's up.

I see them look across at me. I get the high sign and they go to the kitchen. I excuse myself and follow them in.

They waiting for me. Right off, Twist says, "We got him."

"Got who?"

"We got that rat Peaches at the meeting place."

I feel ice in my veins again. Them two is looking at me, waiting for me to say something and I can't move my tongue.

"You ready to go?" Twist says.

"We going to do some fixing."

"Right now?"

"Right now, man. When you expect?"

"Okay, I got to speak to Suzie."

"We'll be downstairs with the others."

The three of us move out of the kitchen. Twist and Jeff speak to some of the others and they make for the door.

I explain to Suzie, tell her I got a little business and to hold tight till I get back, cause it won't be too long.

"Where you going, Cookie?" she

asks.

"No place special. Just hold tight."

The others is out except Twist. He's standing at the door. I hear him say "Keep the party going and don't drink everything up. We'll be back. Hurry it, Cookie."

"Yeah, I'll be with you," I say, and I feel Suzie's hand on my arm. She holding me tight, got a scared look in her eyes. It's like she wants to tell me something and can't.

I give her a peck and say, "Don't worry. You're safe as home. I'll be back for you."

That's all. I swing for the door. Twist is gone. I hit that hall and I'm scared. Got a feeling like something's going to happen.

I can hear the others on the stairs going down. They're talking low. I wait at the top and listen.

Yeah, suppose this is a trick? Something tells me not to go down. I look up the stairs to the roof. That way I can make it, get away.

I'm ready to cut out when I catch myself. Man, if I ever do that then they really got me. I got to go down, bluff it out. All them other cats is stupid. They don't want me. They already got Peaches.

I start down the stairs. The guys is waiting outside. We move together. Nobody's talking. I feel good again, but that don't last. I'm starting to get scared. Suppose they ain't got Peaches? Suppose it's a trap. Twist got too friendly-like all of a sudden.

We keep walking and I'm pouring sweat. Maybe I can bust loose. But

that's a crazy idea. I ain't got a chance for it now.

We pass the candy store and I figure something, tell them I need smokes. I only be a minute.

"Don't make it no more," Twist says, but they don't wait.

That's good. I move into the candy store, grab me a pack of smokes and come on out.

By that time the others is half down the block. I got a chance for it now. All I have to do is cut out around the corner.

I'm ready to run when I see what's wrong. It ain't me they want, or I couldn't pull nothing like this. They wouldn't let me be by myself.

Yeah, I'm all right again. For a minute I almost jammed the works. But they don't know nothing. They all stupid. I start after them, catch up.

We move along, reach Twist's house. Yeah, maybe it is a trap. I fall back a little. Nobody notices. While I'm lighting a cigarette the others move down the cellar steps. It's my last chance to run and I'm ready to take it.

But maybe that's what they want, for me to show my hand. It's a test. They ain't got Peaches. That story was a phony. Twist is bluffing.

It ain't going to work. I start down the steps, move into the cellar.

I'm wrong about Peaches. They got him. He's standing against a wall between two of the boys. That boy is a sad-looking cat, and I almost feel sorry for him.

It's like he don't see me at first. Soon as he does, he starts coming at me. Them other two grab him, rip his shirt, chuck him back against the wall.

"Do that again and you might be dead," Twist tells him. He nods to the others. They let go. Peaches stands there.

"What you going to do with him?" I say.

"What do you do to any rat?"

I don't want to ask any more. This is going to be bad. I don't want to be in on it. Peaches going to get it, and it was me. I want to talk up for him but I can't.

Twist looks around. His face is real evil now. Got a small smile on his face like a cat after he ate the bird.

"Is you studs all set?" he asks.

"Yeah," them others say. But I don't. I wish I wasn't here. Wish my legs would stop shaking.

"Okay," Twist tells us. "This boy is a real rat. His whole family is rats, and we going to mess him up so he know better next time."

He finishes and looks at me. I got the feeling he's talking only to me. Nobody says anything.

"We going to start the usual way," Twist says. "He going to get a slit face, the squealer mark so everybody know not to trust him."

I go sick on that. Peaches going to be cut. I don't want to see no blood.

"Okay, you ready?" Twist says right at me. "Get your stabber out."

"What you want my knife for?"

"Cause you going to slit him, man. What you think?"

I shake my head cause I'm sick enough to throw up.

"Man, what do I have to do it for? What's wrong with somebody else?"

"He put it on you, Cookie, so you get the honor. Bring that knife out and get ready for business."

I don't want to do it, but I got to. There ain't no other way. No way to talk my way out. It's Peaches or me, that's all, and it can't be me. I reach for my switch, bring it out.

"Go ahead, slice him," Twist says.

I can't lift the blade. I can't do it. They stand there, waiting. Twist says, "You chickening out?"

I know I got to do it. I step toward Peaches. He spits in my face. Then I hear them, others laughing.

Next thing they're on me. My arm is bent back and I drop the knife. Peaches is trying to get at me again. They hold him back.

I know what it is now. Twist been playing with me, he sprung the trap. Peaches is still trying to get at me.

Twist looks at me. His face is evil. "You was the cool cat," he tells me. "But this time you forgot yourself. You nothing but a funky rat coming from a long line of funky rats. You got anything to say for yourself before you get what's coming?"

"Yeah, what's this for?"

"You don't know, man?"

"You tell me."

"Okay, I'll oblige. I knew all the time you put that guy on me when we tried to rob that place. That was a rat's job, and now you'd even cut your own friend to save yourself. Boy, you way down."

I look at Peaches. He ain't trying to get at me now. "Yeah, who's saying?" I tell him. "You can't tell me nothing about ratting when you specialize in the same. You and Suzie put the screws on me, so you both is lower-order rats."

Twist smiles on that. "You're wrong, man. I done it. Peaches wasn't in on this till I fixed it. I told him you said he put that guy on. He fell for the line and came in with us.

"You wrong on Suzie, too. She got you to the party thinking she was saving you. I told her, if she loved you, she better bring you along, elsewise you was going to get hurt. Coming back to Peaches, I told him you'd cut him to save your own skin, and that's what happened. You proved that good. Yeah, you was the cool cat with the big brain, but you ain't nothing now. Now you got to suffer."

I'm sweating bad. There's no way

out. I talk fast, say I won't do it no more, but I don't get the break.

"It's too late," Twist says, and he gives the nod.

Jeff moves in. He's got my blade. Next he's got a handful of my shirt. That knife-point is next to my neck.

"Say the word and I'll cut his goddam head off," he says.

"Just his face," Twist says.

I get it before I can holler. Then the others is on me. Feet and fists hit me. I'm down and they're stomping. I try to cover and it ain't no use. They get me, kick me till my ribs is rattling and my brain is going dark. I can't holler. Inside myself I'm saying, *please don't*, when a shoe busts my lips.

Far away I hear Twist say, "That's enough, he's near to dead," and I feel myself being lifted.

They take me to the back yard and dump me, leave me there. Later, I get up. I can hardly walk. Home seems a long way off. It takes time to reach the house and I don't figure to ever make the stairs, but I do.

Can't open the door. I got to knock. Moms answers. I keep my face down till I get inside. Then she sees it and lets out a scream.



Terror in the Night

Marjorie's story wasn't true. It couldn't be. People didn't do things like that any more . . .

BY ROBERT BLOCH



I BLINKED, took another look at the woman standing on the porch. She wasn't wearing a sheet, but she had on the next thing to it — some kind of long white nightgown. Not lingerie, but a real old-fashioned nightgown that came way down to her ankles, or used to. Now it was torn and there were stains on it: dirt or grease. Her hair was hanging in her eyes and she seemed to be crying and panting at the same time. For a minute I didn't recognize her, and then she said, "Bob!"

"Marjorie — come in!"

I turned my head and called up the stairs to Barbara. "Honey. It's Marjorie Kingston."

I closed the door and steered her into the front room. I switched on one of the lamps and she looked at me and said, "Pull the shades, Bob."

She'd stopped crying and her breathing was a little more relaxed by the time Barbara came downstairs.

Barbara didn't say anything. She just walked over to Marjorie and

put her arms around her, and that was the signal for her to really let go.

I finished pulling the shades and took a chair opposite Marjorie.

She said, "I ran away."

"Ran away?" Barbara asked.

Marjorie brushed the hair out of her eyes and looked straight at her. "Oh, you needn't worry about pretending. You must have heard where I've been. At the asylum."

Barbara gave me a look but I didn't say anything. I remembered the day I bumped into Freddie Kingston at lunch in town and he told me about Marjorie. Said she had a nervous breakdown and they were sending her up to this private sanatorium at Elkdale.

"Don't go," she said. "Don't call anyone. Please, Bob. I'm begging you."

"How about Freddie? Shouldn't he know?"

"Not Freddie. Not anybody, not Freddie most of all. You don't understand, do you?"

"Suppose you tell us," Barbara suggested.

"All right!"

I saw how her fingers clenched in her lap. The nails had been bitten down.

I tried to catch Barbara's eye but she wasn't looking at me. She kept staring at Marjorie. And then she said, very softly, "We heard you had a nervous breakdown, dear."

Marjorie nodded. "Oh, that part's true enough. It's been coming on for a long time, only nobody knew about it. That's my fault, really. I

was too proud to tell anyone. About Freddie, I mean."

"What about Freddie?"

"Freddie and this Mona Lester. She's a model. He met her last year, down at the studio. They've been living together ever since. When I found out, he just laughed. He said he wanted a divorce and he'd furnish me all the evidence I needed. Glad to. But, of course, you know I don't believe in divorce. I tried everything — I argued with him, I pleaded with him, I went down on my hands and knees to him, only nothing did any good. He used to stay away night after night, and week-ends too. Then he'd come back and tell me about her. After he found out I wouldn't give him a divorce, I mean. He'd come back and tell me about what he'd been doing with Mona, in detail, everything. You can't imagine the things he said, and the way he'd watch me while he told me. And he used to watch me at parties, too, when we had to go out together. He said he got a kick out of seeing me pretend that everything was all right. Because nobody knew about Mona. You didn't, did you?" She paused for breath.

Barbara bit her lip. "Are you sure you want to talk about this?" she asked. "You mustn't get excited —"

Marjorie made a sound. It took me a second to realize she was laughing, or trying to laugh. "Quit talking like a doctor," she said. "You don't have to humor me. I'm not

crazy, or psychotic. That's the word the doctors use, you know. Psychotic. Or when they talk to the relatives they say, 'mentally disturbed.' It isn't that way with me at all. When I broke down — it was just nerves. I had hysterics. The doctor came; he gave me a sedative and left some pills. I was supposed to take two pills at the most. Freddie gave me six. He kept on feeding me the stuff, all through the next week. When he took me to see Corbel, I was shot. By the time I came to, I was committed. He'd gotten the papers signed and everything. And I woke up in Corbel's little private asylum."

I didn't look at her. I couldn't. She went on talking louder.

"That was three months ago. I've kept track of the days. The hours, even. What else was there to do? Freddie has never come to see me. And nobody else has come, either. He has it fixed with Corbel not to let them. I tried to write until I realized the letters weren't being mailed. And if I got any letters, Corbel saw to it they didn't reach me. It must be costing Freddie a fortune to keep me there, but it's worth it to him. And to the others."

"What others?" Barbara asked.

"The other relatives. Of the other patients, I mean. Most of them are wealthy, you know. We've got some alcoholics and some drug addicts out there, but I wouldn't say any of them were really mental cases. At least they weren't when they arrived. But Corbel does his best to drive

them crazy, to kill them. Fast. Maybe he gets an extra fee that way. He must. Particularly with the old people. The sooner they die, the sooner the relatives inherit."

"This Corbel," I said. "He's a psychiatrist?"

"He's a murderer!" Marjorie leaned forward. "Go ahead, laugh at me — it's true! I can hear, you know. Even when they put me in isolation, I can hear. I stay awake all night and listen. I heard him and Leo beating old Mr. Scheninfarber to death two weeks ago in the hydrotherapy room. They never use it for hydrotherapy at all, you know."

"Who is Leo?" Barbara asked.

"One of the orderlies. Leo and Hugo. Leo's the worst; he's on night duty. He was after me from the beginning."

"What for?"

"Can't you guess?" Marjorie made that laughing sound again. "He's after most of the women patients there. Once he locked Mrs. Mathews in isolation and . . ."

"I see," I said.

Marjorie looked at me. "You don't see. You think I'm lying to you. I can tell. But it's all true. I can prove it. That's why I ran away. Because I'm going to prove it. I want to get to the police."

Barbara reached over and patted her on the shoulder. "It's all right," she said. "It's all right. We believe you, don't we, Bob?"

"I know what it sounds like," Marjorie said, and she was calmer

now. "You tell yourself such things can't happen in this day and age. And you see Doctor Corbel in town and he's such a kind, brilliant man. You go for a drive past the sanatorium and look at the building up on the hill in all those trees and you think it's a beautiful place and a wonderful rest-home for those who can afford it. You don't notice the bars, and you never get inside the soundproof part where you could hear the screams and the moans, or see the stains on the floor in isolation. The stains that won't wash off. Yes, I've made up my mind. I want you to drive me in to the city tonight so that I can make a statement right away."

"I can't," I said. "The car's in the garage but the battery's out of whack. I'm having the garage man out to fix it in the morning."

"It may be too late then," Marjorie said. "They'll cover things up once they realize I'm liable to go to the authorities."

I took a deep breath. "How did you manage to get away?"

Marjorie put her hands down in her lap and looked at them. Her voice was very low.

"Well, tonight Leo was drinking a little. I heard him outside in the hall, whispering the way he always does, and I asked him in. I even took a drink from him just to get him started again. He had quite a few. And then — I let him."

She didn't say anything for almost a minute. Barbara and I waited.

"After he fell asleep, I got his keys. The rest was easy. At first I couldn't get my bearings, but then I remembered the creek running next to the highway. I kept close to the creek at first, wading in the water. That was to throw them off the scent."

"Throw who off the scent?" Barbara asked.

Marjorie's eyes widened. "The bloodhounds."

"What?"

"Didn't you know? Corbel keeps bloodhounds out there. To track down the patients, in case they ever escape."

I stood up.

"Where are you going?"

"To fix your bed," I said.

"I won't sleep," Marjorie told me. "I can't. What if Leo woke up? What if he got Corbel and they called out the bloodhounds to look for me?"

"Don't you worry about a thing," I answered. "No bloodhounds can get in here. We won't let anyone harm you, Marjorie. You're overtired. You've got to rest and forget about —"

"The asylum! You're going to call Corbel!"

"Marjorie, please —"

"I know it! I knew it when you stood up, from the look on your face! You want to send me back, you're going to let them kill me —"

She jumped up. Barbara reached for her and I started forward, but not in time. She hit Barbara in the

face and ran. I tried to head her off from the hall, but she got there first and tugged the front door open. Then she was running, jumping off the porch and circling through the trees in back. I could see her white nightgown waving behind her.

If the car had been running, I would have tried to follow, but even so, there wouldn't have been much chance of catching up, because she wouldn't stick to the roads.

"Poor Marjorie," Barbara said after we'd switched off the light and settled down in bed. "I felt so sorry for her."

"Me too."

"You know, for a while she almost had me believing her. Sometimes those crazy stories turn out to be true after all."

I grunted. "I know. But all that medieval stuff about killing patients in asylums — that's just delusions of persecution."

"Are you sure, Bob?"

"Of course I'm sure. I admit I had my doubts for a while, too. But you know what tipped the scales?"

"What?"

"When she got to that part about the bloodhounds. That did it, for me. Only a nut would dream up an idea like that."

"It bothers me, though. Don't

you think we ought to call the sheriff after all? Or this Doctor, or Freddie? That poor girl, running around out there all alone —"

"Don't worry, they'll get her. And she'll be taken care of."

"I can't help thinking about what she said though. Do you think the part about this Leo was true?"

"I told you, it's delusions of persecution, Barbara. The whole works: about Freddie and his woman, about the killings, everything. Now just forget it."

She was quiet for a minute and I was quiet for a minute, and then we heard the noise. Faint and far away it was, but I recognized it.

"What's that?" Barbara asked.

I sat up in bed, listening to it, listening to it get closer and closer; I was still listening to it when it faded off in the distance again.

"What's that?" Barbara asked, again.

"Oh, just some damned dogs on the loose," I told her. "Lots of strays out here, you know."

"But don't they sound like —"

"They sound like dogs on the loose," I told her, harshly. "Now go to sleep."

I guess she did. I hope she did. After all, Barbara isn't a Southerner born and bred, like me. She wouldn't recognize the sound.



Campan's empire was growing. Pretty soon nothing could stop Campan at all — not as long as he had his

Handy Man

BY FLETCHER FLORA

CAREY REGAN had word that Campan wanted to see him at his apartment, so Carey went up. It was Campan's wife, Phyllis, who opened the door.

"Hello, Phyl," Carey said.

Such abbreviations usually suggest intimacy, and in this case the suggestion was valid. Carey and Phyl knew each other better than Campan dreamed. She was wearing a white cashmere sweater tucked into the waist of a pair of blue velvet treader pants. Her short black hair had a seductively tousled look, as if she'd just crawled out of bed, and the bright lips that could thin on provocation to a hard red line were now relaxed in a receptive pout. She put her arms around Carey's neck and her mouth on Carey's mouth, and for a long minute or two the situation was pretty exciting, but it couldn't develop much because of Campan, who was certainly near by.

Pretty soon she stepped back and said, "Campan's waiting for you.



Campan calls and Carey comes running."

He raised an eyebrow and hid his sudden anger behind a derisive smile. "Campan? You too? Has he started taking his ego to bed with you yet?"

"The last name stuff, you mean? Why not? It's the sign of a man getting big. It's a man riding a star."

"Sure. Drop the Adolph. Drop the Benito. In this case, drop the Joseph. Just Campan. Even to his wife, just Campan."

"You sound bitter, darling. Why? You're going along, aren't you? On the ride, that is. Campan needs you. He needs an errand boy. He needs a smooth, hard guy with practically no conscience."

"Where is he?"

"In the office. Stop and have a drink with me on the way out."

"Maybe."

He walked the length of the living room and went into a short hall and down the hall to the door of the room Campan used as an office. He knocked and heard Campan's voice telling him to come in. Inside, he closed the door behind him and leaned his shoulders against it. It wasn't a large room. There was a rug and a desk and three chairs and a green metal filing cabinet. That was all. Campan was a luxury-loving guy who would eventually run to fat, but in this one room he affected a phony Spartan simplicity. It was very odd. It probably indicated something or other about his character.

Campan said, "Come in, Carey. Sit down."

Carey crossed to a chair and sat, looking at Campan behind the desk. Campan looked the same as last time, but this was an illusion. He wasn't the same because every time he was a little bigger, and bigger is different. Every time he was a little

more Campan and a little less Joseph. The short body, the brown, tight, glossy skin that looked stuffed to bursting, the pale brown eyes, almost yellow at times, the small pink bud of a mouth — these were nearly constant, changing only in the very slow and indiscernible process of getting day-by-day older. But these were not Campan. These were only Campan's baggage. Campan himself was inside. Campan himself kept getting bigger and bigger. Campan was a voracious ego eating itself to immensity. Hardly anything bothered him. Danger didn't bother him. Cruelty didn't bother him. Death didn't bother him. Only the thought of defeat bothered him. He had been defeated a few times in his life, and the ones responsible for his defeat had lived to regret it. Or, precisely, had in certain cases *not* lived to regret it.

Carey wondered how he did it. All the money coming in. All the power coming in with the money. All the officials in his pocket. Growing right up in the fat rackets to measure stature with no one but the Swede himself. Someone had to go. Either Campan or the Swede. Everyone on the inside understood it and kept wondering when it would be and which it would be, because they thought, of course, that it would be very nice to get on the right side in good time.

"You wanted to see me?" Carey said.

"That's right." Campan's little

pink bud of a mouth spread on his teeth. "You like a drink?"

"No, thanks. Phyllis asked me to have one with her on the way out."

"Sure. You do that. You have a drink with Phyllis and then run on and do this little job I have in mind."

Carey found a cigarette and lit it. "What job?" he said.

Campan didn't answer directly. He sat back and folded his hands across the belly that would someday get sloppy. He watched Carey go through the business with the cigarette, and his pink mouth kept smiling, but his eyes hadn't even begun. They were more yellow than brown, Carey decided. There seemed to be a light behind them on the inside.

"I got a call from the Swede," Campan said.

"Yes?"

"I said so. Couple hours ago. He wants to see me."

"When?"

"Ten, he said. Tonight."

"Where?"

"You know that little office he keeps down on Twelfth?"

"Sure. Everyone knows it. It's the one he started in. So he's superstitious about it. So he keeps it."

"All right. I know the legend. That's where. At ten tonight."

"He told you to come? Like ordering up a bellhop?"

"That's the way. Real brusque. Does Campan run when someone calls?"

"Maybe when the Swede calls."

"No. Yesterday, yes. Today, no. Campan doesn't run."

"Who runs? Carey Regan?"

"Campan's shadow. Campan's right arm. The guy who goes where Campan goes and shares in Campan's take. Is that Carey Regan?"

"What does the Swede want?"

"He didn't say, but it wasn't necessary. He wants to draw a line. He wants to draw a line right in front of Campan. This far, he wants to say. No farther, Campan. Time's up, I mean. Tonight at ten, Carey, time's up."

"About the line. You going across?"

"Going? I'm already across. I've been across for longer than the Swede will ever know. Connections I've got. Strategy I've got. The Swede goes, Campan's in his place. Just like that. All at once, Campan's there. It'll look real simple, but it hasn't been. There's been work. There's been deals. There's been waiting."

"But the Swede's still there."

"Until ten. He set the time himself. It's sad to think of a big guy's last hours. To think about everything he's been and done, and all the time it's taken, and how in a little while it'll all be gone. Nothing left. Like it never was. It's sad as hell, Carey. Thinking about something like that could break a guy up. Well, he's been around a long time. He's had quite a run, and no reasonable guy can expect to last forever."

"Will he be alone?"

"As alone as he ever gets."

"He and Johnny Derry?"

"That's right. He didn't say Johnny would be there, but you can count on it. He's always there. The Swede's getting old, and there are a lot of guys around who think it would be a good thing if he didn't get any older. You can always count on Johnny being around."

"The two of them. The Swede and Johnny."

"Two. No matter how many times you add it, it comes out two."

"It'll be quite a job of work."

"I like a guy who can do a job of work. A guy like that is a guy Campan likes to do something for."

"You'll want a report?"

"Naturally. I'll sleep better if I have a report."

"Here?"

He shook his head. "Not here. I'll be with a few boys at the Line Club. About eleven I'll slip out to the Caddy in the parking lot in back. You know my slot. Come there."

"I'll come. About eleven."

"You're a good boy, Carey. You're Campan's good boy. You sure you don't want a drink?"

"I'll have it with Phyllis, if you don't mind. She's prettier."

Campan was pleased, and he laughed. It pleased him to have people tell him how pretty Phyllis was. She was his property, and it was right that Campan's property should be a credit to him. It was

good that people should envy Campan his property.

"Sure," he said. "Campan's good boy and Campan's pretty wife. Have your drink together."

"Thanks."

Carey stood up and went out into the hall and down the hall into the living room again. Phyl had a shaker ready. She poured twice and held out a glass. He went over and took hold of the wrist behind the glass and pulled her to him, and she stood leaning against him with her arms spread and a glass in each hand and her face lifted for his kiss. When the kiss was over, she stepped back with a deep breath that was like a shudder running through her body. She lifted her glass and drained it and turned away to set the empty glass on a table.

"Too bad you're just a handy-man," she said. "Too bad you're just big enough for odd times."

"Sure," he said. "Too bad. Do I get that other drink?"

She turned back and handed it to him, and he drank it and dropped the glass on the carpet and set his foot on the glass deliberately. She looked down at the foot on the glass and listened to the grating sound of shards being ground into rich wool pile.

"See you later," he said. "Some other odd time. Right now I've got an errand to run. Campan's good boy with an errand to run."

He left the apartment and went downstairs to his car in the street.

In the car, he drove to a bar where the name and tastes of Carey Regan were known. Without having to specify it, he got a bourbon on the rocks and sat on a stool in cool shadows and nursed it. There was a baseball game on television, and one team was ahead, but then the other team tied it, and it was the ninth frame, and it looked like extra innings. Which it turned out to be. He nursed the bourbon through inning ten and got a fresh one for inning eleven, and in the top of the eleventh the visitors scored once on a double and a single back to back, but then in the bottom of the eleventh the crumby pitcher walked a pair and threw a gopher ball, so the home team won by two, and everyone lined up at the bar seemed to think it made a pretty exciting and satisfactory game, and anyhow the game and the second bourbon were finished at the same time. Carey got off his stool and went back to his car and drove to his apartment, which was smaller than Campan's and cheaper than Campan's and just about right for Campan's right arm.

In the apartment, he took off his coat, took off his tie, sat in a chair. That's all he did. Just sat in a chair. He didn't drink, he didn't smoke, he almost didn't move. This was a kind of conditioning process and was something he always did when there was a job to do that was a little bigger than the usual jobs. It was peculiar how it worked. He sat there

for a long time, for hours maybe, and he didn't do anything but think of this and that, whatever came into his mind, and all the while the thought of the job was there too, the thought of the job that had to be done, and he could feel the hardness start and spread outward from a tiny core in the center of him, the cold impervious hardness that was like stone and made him a stone man, and when it was time at last to go on the job he was someone who could do this job or any job in the world.

The last part of the afternoon passed, and the time for eating passed without recognition, because there is no hunger in stone, and the first part of the evening passed in turn. He thought about the Swede, the legend of him, how he had started from nothing and grown to something and how he would soon go back to nothing much faster than he had come from it, and he thought of Campan, drop the Joseph, and of what a bad day it had been for the Swede when Mrs. Campan, not Phyl, had gone into confinement with her sixth son, the same Joseph before the drop. From there it was quite natural to pass on to the thought of Mrs. Campan, Phyl, and of numerous odd times that might become steady times if only a man got big enough to drop a name or fill a place someone moved out of. He thought of these things, as well as other lesser things, and lights came up in the streets outside, and time

passed, and it got to be nine-thirty.

Getting up from the chair, he put on shoulder harness and put a silenced .45 in the holster under his left arm and put his coat on over the harness and the holster and the .45. Then he remembered the tie he had taken off, and he put that on too, standing in front of the mirror in the bedroom and watching the sure, stone hands fashion the knot and never seeing at all the face above the hands. The knot tied and adjusted, he went downstairs to the street and his car and started for Twelfth and, on the way to the narrow street in the shabby section where the Swede had started and would shortly end (cross fingers and never doubt it), he began for the first time to think in detail about the best way to do the job.

They would be in the little office, the Swede and Johnny Derry, and chances were they would be alone, the pair of them, although there was an outside chance they would not, and if they were not it would be just too bad, but this was a chance a right arm had to take on a job like this, and anyhow they would probably be alone, just the pair of them. One way would be to go up and knock and go in when invited, but then they would see that it was not Campan, but Campan's right arm, and this would certainly make them wary and reduce the chance of success. Another way, the only other way that he could think of, since the window was not accessible, was

to go up and knock but not go in when invited, standing instead in the hall and doing the job from there, with only seconds, maybe three, allowed between the time the door was opened and the time the job was finished. It was such a small room that he could easily reach anyone in it who was not right up against the wall the door was in, and this was another chance to be taken. It would be better if he didn't have to knock at all, if the door were unlocked, but this was not to be anticipated because the Swede was a great one for locking doors as a justified precaution.

He reached Twelfth and drove down it and parked his car a block above the building in which Johnny and the Swede sat waiting for something they didn't expect. He walked the block in the shadow of buildings and turned into the entrance to the building and climbed narrow stairs to a narrow hall, and the air in the hall was hot and oppressive, and it stank. He walked down to the door to the Swede's old office and knocked and as he knocked with one hand the .45 was in the other.

Beyond the door, Johnny Derry's voice said, "Who is it?" and he answered, "Campan," in Campan's voice, which was a trick he'd perfected for practical purposes.

The lock clicked, and the door opened, and there was Johnny like a sitting pigeon, acquiring and losing in a terrible instant the knowledge that he had made a mistake that

would be his last one. The .45 coughed, and he was pushed back out of the way as if by the breath of it, and beyond him, behind an ancient desk which was another item of sentiment, the Swede moved with a jerk in the desperate exigency, but the Swede was getting old, the Swede was getting slow, and now he was too old and too slow to live, but not to die, and he fell back into the chair and slipped sideways out of it and was swiftly dead before he reached the floor. Johnny, who had begun dying first, was not yet dead. He lifted his head from the floor and coughed blood and was dead then. Carey put the .45 away and went downstairs and rewalked the block to his waiting car.

It was then ten-o-five. When he reached the parking lot behind the Line Club, it was ten-thirty. About eleven, Campan had said. Carey left his own car by the lot exit and went across to Campan's reserved slot and got into the front seat of Campan's Caddy. He lit a cigarette with the dash lighter. A man and a woman came and got into a car and drove out of the lot. He sat and smoked and waited.

It must have been eleven when Campan came. Carey couldn't see the face of his wrist watch, and the clock on the dash had quit running. Campan opened the door on the left side and slipped in under the wheel. He was smoking a cigar and had been drinking. He was heavy with the smell of rich Havana to-

bacco and rich Kentucky bourbon.

"How did it go?" he said.

"Fine. Everything went fine."

Campan laughed. There was no other sound in the lot. There was no one else in the lot to make a sound. Just Campan, drop the Joseph, and Carey, his right arm.

"You're a good boy, Carey," Campan said. "Campan won't forget it."

"Thanks," Carey said.

He took the .45 out of its holster and shot Campan twice. Campan's body struck the door and arched upward in a violent reaction that drove the belly against the wheel, and then it collapsed with a great sigh and the head dropped back against the seat, and it looked for all the world as if Campan were catching forty winks, and that's exactly what they thought at first when they found him later. Carey got out on his side and went back to his own car and drove to Campan's apartment.

Phyl opened the door, just as she had opened it earlier, and this had the effect of completing the cycle nicely. She had been drinking alone and listening to tangos, and the last of the drinks was still in her hand, and the last of the tangos was still on the machine. Her eyes flared with pleasure that he had come and fear that he would be caught at it.

"Are you crazy?" she said. "Campan may be here any minute."

He stepped into the room and closed the door.

"Campan won't come," he said.

"How do you know? Have you seen him?"

"I have. He's dead."

She stood looking at him, the blood draining from her face and returning slowly in two feverish spots high on the bones of her cheeks. She breathed deeply and very slowly, as if breathing were a great pain to her.

"Dead?" she said. "Campan dead?"

"Campan dead, the Swede dead. The Swede died first and left an empty place, and Campan was going to fill it, but now Campan's dead too, and that still leaves the empty place for someone to fill. Guess who."

"You? Carey Regan?"

"Campan said he had connections. He said he had strategy. Work and

deals and waiting, he said. Was he the only one? Did he really think he was the only one? Working and dealing and waiting are things that anyone can do, even an odd-times guy, and it was his mistake if he never knew it."

"Can you do it, Carey? Can you fill the place?"

"I can fill it. It's fixed. Once it's fixed, you move hard and fast, and that's all of it."

The spots were spreading and brightening in her cheeks. In her eyes was a gathering intensity of light. She seemed to be burning with a fever of excitement that would surely consume her and leave her a cinder.

"Carey," she said. "Carey."

He smiled at her thinly.

"Just call me Regan," he said.



YOU, detective

No. 6—THE BURGLED APARTMENT

*Mr. Edward D. Hoch
1401 Lake Avenue
Rochester, New York*

"But how —" Rogers began.

"You killed your wife, Mr. Rogers," Leeds said. "You must have, because this broken glass is *outside* the door, showing that the window was broken from the inside, after the killer had entered the apart-

ment. And you, Mr. Rogers, had the only other key."

"That's fantastic," Rogers said flatly. "Grimm, here, could have entered the apartment just by ringing the bell and waiting for my wife to open the door. He could have killed her and then broken the glass from inside the apartment —"

"That's right," Leeds said. "Except for one fact: your wife was sleeping when she was killed. She couldn't have opened the door for any one. And you've got the only key."

They're Chasing Us!

BY HERBERT D. KASTLE

*It was just like a regular business deal
— until they shot the cop . . .*

ALL THE WAY BACK he was sick. His stomach churned and there was a throbbing pain behind his eyes. He drove slowly through the dark Brooklyn streets, though he wanted to race home. He had to

drive slowly. It would be one hell of a note to get tagged for speeding now!

He saw the cop leaning against the factory wall as he stopped for a light at Atlantic and Vanderbilt.

The cop looked cold. The cop suddenly stepped away from the wall and walked across the sidewalk and into the gutter. He came toward the car and Sid pulled the Smith & Wesson .38 Detective Special from his overcoat and put it on his lap. He put his right hand over it.

The cop walked behind the car and Sid picked up the .38. The cop kept walking, across the street, and Sid put the gun back in his pocket and lit a cigarette. The light changed and he pulled away, moving faster. He checked his rear view mirror, but there hadn't been a chase at the scene of the job and there wasn't any now.

Only one thing bothered him. Just how hard had Melvin hit that clerk? Murder was a tough rap. Of course, the damn fool had given Melvin trouble. Lucky Mel hadn't used his switchblade. That would have made it murder for sure.

He made a right on Pennsylvania Avenue and turned left when he hit New Lots. He went out past the old church and turned left again and pulled to a stop in front of a dark frame house. He shut his lights and twisted around in the seat and picked up the briefcase from the floor in back. He left the key in the ignition, got out, slammed the door without locking it, and began to walk. It was real cold, even for November. He pulled up the collar of his coat and walked faster. When he reached the corner, he looked back. There wasn't anyone moving

on the dark street. He turned left and walked four blocks to New Jersey Avenue. He went down New Jersey Avenue and reached the two-family house and climbed the steps. He opened the door and entered the dimly-lit ante-room and moved to the door on his left — the one that led to the ground-floor apartment. He pressed the button and chimes sounded.

Norma got there fast. She opened the door and stepped aside and he came in. He walked down the dark foyer to the kitchen. He sat down and put the briefcase on the floor and rubbed his hands together. He felt much better.

"Cold as hell," he said.

"Yes, Sid. How'd it go?"

He smiled and nodded. "Smooth," he said, and unbuttoned his coat. He stood up and she helped him get the coat off. She took his hat from his head and went out to the closet. When she came back, he was sitting again, rubbing his hands together again.

"Melvin?" she said.

"Fine. We split up, like usual. He'll ride around a while — check us until he's dead certain no tail's around. He should be here in twenty minutes, a half hour."

She let out her breath and came around the table and sat down facing him. She was a tall, round-faced woman in her mid-thirties, not pretty and not plain. She had a good figure; slightly on the fleshy side but still good in that she had slim legs, a

narrow waist, flaring hips and large breasts. Sid looked at her and suddenly wet his lips.

"Norma," he said. "We got a few minutes —"

She stood up and went to the stove. There was a coffee pot perking over a low flame. She picked it up and carried it to the table and put it on the gray formica top. She went to a closet over the sink and opened the double doors and took out three cups and carried them to the table.

"Norma," Sid said, and his voice was a little hoarse. "It isn't fair you should only be with Mel."

She looked at him, and even as she made her full lips come together in a tight line of disapproval, her hand rose to her short-cut brown hair, patting it, arranging it, and her hips moved so that she went into the traditional hippy stance of a woman seeking approval, seeking to arouse desire.

"Mel's my man," she said sharply. "It isn't my fault Tina left you. You know how it was — me and Mel, you and Tina. Three years."

He nodded. "Sure. But I never really went for her. I always went for you." He looked up at her, eyes slipping down and then returning to her face. "Honest, baby," he said, and when he took a drag of his cigarette his hand trembled.

"Now you cut that out," she said, but the words were delivered without strength. "I don't want trouble between you and Mel." Her voice was thick. His eyes moved over her.

"There won't be no trouble," Sid said, and ground out his cigarette into a small, square ashtray. "He won't know. Maybe we can tell him, later, and make some sort of arrangement."

"That isn't decent," she said. But her eyes were on his.

He shrugged. "Mel understands how it is. You aren't married. We'll all three get along fine. I'll bet he even laughs when we tell him."

"We won't tell him," she said. "There isn't going to be any arrangement." She stepped forward, toward the closet, reaching out to shut the double doors. "So please forget it," she said, and then stopped as his hand stroked her. She stood there, rigid, and then slapped his hand away. She reached the closet and closed the doors and turned back to the table. "You been without Tina four months now," she said, and cleared her throat. "That's why."

Sid stood up and reached her in a single step. He pulled her against him and kissed her hard, so that her head was pushed back and her body arched into his. The kiss lasted a long time and his hands moved over her body insistently.

She slipped her lips to the side. "You love me?" she murmured.

For a second his thin face twisted, as if he were repressing laughter. "Now, Norma," he said. "You know I do. Why else would I want you?"

"Aw, hell," she said. "I don't even know any more what makes

love." She moved her lips back into line and gave herself to his kiss, gave her body to his movements.

Sid let her go and rubbed his face nervously. "C'mon," he said, and pulled her into the foyer and then into the bedroom.

"No," she said. "Mel will be here. Let's wait —"

He caressed her, moving his hands gently at first over the curves of her body. Her breath was coming faster and she sat down on the bed. He sat down beside her.

"Come on," Sid said. "Come on, baby."

"No . . ."

He let his hands grow stronger, not so gentle now. Very slowly he let her relax back, lying on the bed. She was breathing rapidly. Her eyes closed and then she was holding him . . .

Later, he came out of the bathroom and looked in the bedroom. He heard her in the kitchen and went there. She was pouring coffee in two of the three cups. He went up to her and kissed her on the neck and said, "Hello, baby."

She smiled, but then moved away. "You hear the doorbell before?"

He shook his head. "But I figured he must have been around."

"Naturally. It's almost half an hour since you walked in. He'll know, Sid."

Sid sat down and sipped at his cup of black coffee. "Naw," he said. "I'll tell him we were playing safe.

I'll tell him I thought I spotted a tail and didn't want to answer the door until I was sure it was safe."

She sat down and lifted her cup, but the chimes sounded. She got up and looked at Sid and said, "Damn!"

He said, "Go on. It's all right. You know me and Mel."

She left the room. He dug cigarettes from his pocket and lit one and took a drag. As he exhaled smoke through his nostrils, Mel came into the kitchen, taking off his coat and hat. He gave the clothing to Norma and sat down in her chair and gulped her coffee.

"Cold outside," he said, and then leaned back and squinted his eyes at Sid. He looked very much like Sid, except he was older. They were both medium-sized men, slender, with light brown hair and long, thin faces. Sid was thirty-four, Mel a few months shy of forty. But Sid ran the operation. They were brothers.

"So," Sid said. "What took you so long?"

Mel reached across the table and helped himself to a cigarette from Sid's pack. He lit it and smiled. "I froze myself ringing that bell. Then I figured I'd better take a fast walk before someone wondered why I couldn't get into my own place."

Norma came into the kitchen and stood near the doorway. "Maybe you should carry keys —"

Sid said, "No keys on a job. Nothing on a job except a car, a gun, a briefcase. That way if one is caught the others —"

"Right," Mel interrupted. "But I was freezing and I decided to take a walk. I gave you two some extra minutes." He smoked and smiled.

Sid looked at him. Norma said, "How about something to eat?"

Mel shrugged and said, "Let's not play stupid games. I saw it coming. It's okay with me." He shrugged again.

Sid examined his hands. Norma said, "I didn't mean to, Mel. But no hard feelings?"

Mel smiled at her. "Honey, we've had almost three years. It's time for a change. I'm glad you're going to be around, and I hope you won't get mad when I bring someone else around."

She shook her head. "Let's eat, huh?"

"Right," Mel said, and rubbed his hands together. "How about it, Sid? What'd we make?"

Sid looked down and saw the briefcase lying there. He shook his head in amazement and glanced at Norma. He hadn't even thought of the haul. That woman was going to make him happy.

He picked up the briefcase and opened it and dumped its contents on the table. Norma was at the stove, banging pots, opening cans. She hummed softly as she worked and she turned to smile at Sid several times. Sid managed to smile back at her as he put the money into denominational stacks — ones, fives, tens, twenties, fifties, and five one-hundred-dollar bills.

"One thousand eighty-three," he said.

Mel had been leaning forward, excited. He slumped back, slammed his left hand on the formica. "Such a big store. Such a careful casing. It looked like twenty-five hundred to three grand for sure. Bigger than a Key-Food. Bigger than a Bohack. A big, big place. How the hell —" He stopped and shook his head and put out his cigarette. "And maybe a murder rap too."

"Sure," Sid said, putting the money back into the briefcase. "You hit that clerk real hard. Did you check him after?"

Mel nodded. "He was breathing. But his head was bashed. I don't think so, but he could croak."

Sid closed the briefcase and put it on the floor. "Makes no difference. We aren't going to get caught."

Mel said, "Right. And even if we are, we're not going back to the pen."

They looked at each other, nodding, grim-faced. They'd been up twice before. They'd spent a total of eight years in prison — five for Mel and three for Sid. They'd had enough.

"Better call Tony," Norma said, coming to the table and putting down three large plates.

Mel said, "I'll do it. Where'd you park the Pontiac, Sid?"

Sid told him. Mel went out into the foyer and picked up the phone from the low table. He dialed, waited, said, "Let me speak to Mr. Guerino.

That you, Tony? Mel. Those cars are ready to be picked up." He told Tony where they were and said, "Replace them right away — tonight. And make them *good*. That '50 Pontiac had no pickup. Give us a couple of hot ones, see?" He listened, said, "Don't you try upping the ante on us, mister. Two hundred a car for a few weeks is clear gravy. Sure, sure. I know all about your risks. What do you think we take, chances on a punchboard? Stop crying and tell me what to look for. And nothing flashy. Black jobs." He listened again, said, "Okay," hung up and returned to the kitchen.

"He still trying to squeeze us?" Sid said, speaking around a mouthful of food.

"Yeah. Wants to raise us fifty per car. Damn louse!"

"Eat up," Norma said, sitting down at the table, between them.

"I got to put his payoff in one of the cars," Mel said. "He might get there fast, for a change."

Norma got up and took his plate and brought it to the stove. "Okay. I'll kept it warm for you."

"Give me four bills," Mel said to Sid.

Sid kept chewing and reached down and dug into the briefcase. He looked up. "Think he might stand still if I *really* gave you four bills?"

Mel shrugged. "He'll squawk, but maybe not too loud. Let's try it. Why should *we* have to risk passing the C notes?"

Sid took out four one-hundred-

dollar bills and looked at them. "He'll yell," he muttered. "He'll yell his head off. But let him." Then he shook his head and put the four bills back in the briefcase. He pulled out a pack of twenties and counted off ten and handed them to Mel. He added four fifties and said, "We've got to keep him happy. We can't take too many chances. We're both lousy on car heists."

Mel put the money in his pocket and went into the foyer. He got his coat and hat from the closet and put them on as he walked to the door. He went out of the apartment.

Sid and Norma ate the ham and canned vegetables and drank coffee. As they were finishing, the chimes sounded. Norma went to the door and then she came into the kitchen and went to the stove for Mel's plate. Mel came in a minute later, sat down, said, "We got bills to pay. There's that stupid bet you made on the nags, and the rent, and Norma's expenses."

Sid lit a cigarette, leaned back, nodded. "We'll end up with about four hundred. That's got to carry us until we do another job."

Norma brought Mel's plate and sat down to finish her coffee. "We never seem to get ahead," she said. "Why is it?"

Sid smoked and said, "We haven't hit a big payoff in a long time."

Mel swallowed a mouthful of food. "We never hit a really big one."

"What about the eighteen grand in '47?"

"So? We never got to spend it, did we?"

Sid shrugged. "I was just mentioning it. If we hadn't been nailed, that would have put us way ahead."

Norma cleared her throat and said, "Did you boys ever think —" She looked down, smiled in an embarrassed way. "Maybe you two should go straight."

Sid looked at her. "Maybe. And we've thought of it plenty. But it's no good. It's too late."

"It's never too late," Mel said dramatically, making his voice deep. "Never, my son." He looked at Norma. "That what you're thinking?"

Norma said, "Well —"

"We've got records," Sid said, smoking contentedly. "We'd starve. This way it isn't so bad."

Norma said, "I used to think we were way ahead of everyone. Now I know different. There are people on this block who make sixty-seventy bucks a week and live as good as us, maybe better."

"Nice to know," Sid said. "But one day we hit a big payoff and then we go out to Florida and maybe break in on the rackets. Then we drive Caddys, drink champagne and you wear mink."

She smiled. "Yeah. That's it. The people around here live regular, but they can't ever get out of Brooklyn. We've always got a chance of making it."

Sid nodded. "Our ceiling is unlimited. There's no telling what —"

The door chimes sounded. Sid picked up the briefcase and ran softly to the foyer closet. He grabbed his overcoat and dropped the briefcase while he got into his coat. He retrieved the briefcase with his left hand, drew his gun from his overcoat pocket with his right, and stepped aside for Mel. Mel got into his overcoat and drew his Luger. Norma stood in the kitchen doorway, watching.

"Take it easy," she whispered. "You two are always so jumpy —"

Sid jerked his head at the door. Norma shrugged and walked past the brothers, face worried but not frightened. She shook her head slightly, as if to say it was a neighbor or a charity collector or someone else quite normal and harmless. She got to the door and said, "Who is it?"

"Telephone repairman," a deep voice said.

Norma turned her head, and now she was frightened. Sid moved his gun, pushing it toward the door, and mouthed the words, "Talk, we'll check." He repeated the exaggerated lip movements until she nodded that she understood. She turned back to the door and said, "I didn't call for a repairman. Our phone is all right."

Sid ran softly to the bedroom as the voice answered peremptorily, harshly. He reached the window and put his gun in his pocket. He opened the window and crawled out, awkward in the heavy coat and with the briefcase in his left hand. He dropped

three feet to the back-yard's hard earth, and Mel came right behind him. They crouched low and ran toward the fence on their left, passing the end of an alley.

Footsteps pounded up the alley, a voice shouted, "Back here, Carl! The yard!"

Inside the house, Norma screamed, and upstairs a window opened and Mrs. Krantz said, "What's the matter?"

Sid reached the fence and threw the briefcase over and leaped up and clawed his way to the top and over. As he hit the ground there were three or four shots, close together, almost blending. Mel screamed and fell heavily beside him.

"Hit," Mel said. "Sid. I'm hit!"

Sid found the briefcase and said, "Get up. You're okay. Get up." He began to run toward the alley, but stopped and looked back. Mel was getting up, moving toward him, breaking into a staggering run. Sid waited, grabbed Mel's arm, dragged him along as he sprinted down the alley.

Just as they reached the street, a shot blasted behind them. Sid shoved Mel on, drew his .38, fired into the alley three times. He faced the street again and saw that Mel was almost at the corner of New Lots. He caught up with him, heard shouts, glanced back to see two cops erupt from the alley. He turned the corner, and sent a slug back at them, and knew they'd dive for cover for at least a few seconds. One of them coughed.

"My car's on the next block," Mel panted as Sid came up to him again. "Go on ahead — get her started."

Sid pulled him along, saying, "We can make it together."

"Go on!" Mel said, trying to shake loose. "Go —"

A man and woman stepped out of a doorway and stopped, looking at the two men running toward them.

"Go on," Mel said, and raised his Luger. "I'll use the broad for cover."

The couple had begun to turn back, but Sid was on them and said, "Stay still or you're dead."

The woman made a crying sound as Sid ran by. He reached the next corner and looked back. Mel was swinging with his Luger and the man was going down, limp. The woman screamed, and then Sid was around the corner and running fast, eyes straining to spot the black Chevy sedan. He was a third of the way down the block when a thought made his stomach knot. What if Tony had already changed the cars? Mel had talked to him, and Mel hadn't told Sid what the replacements would be. Sid wouldn't be able to recognize —

He saw the Chevy just then, on the other side of the street, and used every last ounce of strength to reach it. He opened the door, got inside, threw the briefcase over his shoulder and fumbled for the ignition. The key was there and he turned it and got the Chevy started. He swung out into the

street; then shifted into reverse and backed toward the corner.

"Sid!" Mel's voice called.

Sid stopped and leaned across to open the door. Mel came staggering up, pushing the woman ahead of him. She was tall and dark-haired and she seemed too frightened to scream. As they got to the car the woman twisted around and tried to break away, but Mel grabbed her arm and pulled her back. She screamed once and he hit her with his open palm. Then she was quiet as Mel shoved her in front and slammed the door and reached for the rear door. Sid leaned over the still woman and pulled up the little button on the rear door. Mel opened it and climbed inside.

Sid turned to the road and shifted fast and had the Chevvy doing sixty before they reached the corner. He held his breath and kept going, straight across the intersection, and didn't breathe again until they reached the other side. He made the next three blocks the same way, and even though it was almost twelve he felt they were lucky not to get hit going across intersections that fast and without lights. On the fourth corner he made a right and at the next corner another right and then pulled to the curb and shut the ignition.

The woman was sitting rigidly, breathing fast. Her eyes were closed. Sid slapped her as hard as he could and she gasped and turned to him. He slapped her again. She started to scream but he clamped his hand over

her mouth. "Don't try anything funny," he said. She twisted in the seat and, keeping one hand over her mouth, he hit her in the stomach with his other fist. The first time, she jerked and struggled, but he found the right spot with the next blow and she went limp. He let her go. Then he looked in back and saw that Mel was lying on his side on the seat. He said, "How is it?"

Mel groaned. "Hurts like hell."

"Where?"

"You'll laugh when I tell you."

"Sure. I'll bust a gut." He turned and pushed the woman's head down so it wouldn't show above the window. He lay down too, head on her body, and said, "Make me laugh."

"In the can," Mel said, and groaned again. "Not too bad because I think the bullet went through, sort of sideways when I was up on that fence. Isn't that a laugh?"

"A scream," Sid said, and froze as a car tore by. "You bleeding much?"

"Like a pig. You got any idea how to stop it — where do you tie the tourniquet?" He made a laughing sound.

"We'll get you to Phil Gargen," Sid said.

"He won't touch us on the run," Mel said. "You know that. It'll have to be a straight doc, and a gun job."

"No matter what," Sid said. "We'll get you a doc."

The woman sighed and stirred. Sid raised himself and rabbit-punched her. She quivered and went limp.

Sid said, "We can't ditch the car with you hit. We'll have to take our chances." He opened the door and shoved the woman. She fell to the gutter. He jumped out, grabbed her under the arms and dragged her to the sidewalk. Then he got back in the car and drove off, still without lights.

They reached the Manhattan Bridge at one-fifteen, after sticking to side streets and doing some backtracking, and Sid had his lights on. They drove over the bridge and down Canal and up Broadway. They reached the small hotel near 8th Street, and Sid parked on the dark side street.

"He won't do it," Mel said, voice tired.

Sid leaned over the seat and found the briefcase. He picked it up and opened the door. "He'll do it."

"Don't try to make him," Mel said, raising himself on an elbow. "He's as tough as any con."

"I won't try anything. I'll just use the dough. He'll do it."

"That's our stake. How we gonna live?"

Sid got out and said, "We'll worry about that later." He closed the door and walked toward Broadway. He came back about ten minutes later, minus the briefcase. A tall, heavy man was with him. The tall, heavy man got in back; Sid got in front.

Phil Gargen said, "Get moving."

Sid turned his head. "It's bad enough you want to do it in the car, but driving yet!"

"You heard me. Or do you want your money back?"

Sid glared at him. "Listen, Doc —"

The doctor opened his small bag and put his right hand inside and kept it there. "I'm listening."

Mel said, "Sid, for God's sake, do like he wants or call it off."

Sid hissed through his teeth and started the car and pulled slowly away from the curb. He drove across Broadway and kept to dark streets for the next twenty minutes, trying not to hear the harsh breathing and occasional low cries coming from the rear. Then the doctor said, "Okay, take me home."

Sid drove back to 8th Street, parked, turned his head. The doctor was looking at him, right hand in his bag. Mel was lying on his side, eyes closed, face all screwed together in pain.

"He'll be fine in a few days," the doctor said. "Just get him to bed soon, let him sleep, give him one of these if he feels pain." He handed Sid a small bottle. "All he needs is the time to regain lost blood. That bullet did nothing more than tear a gash in his right buttock." He opened the door and got out, hand still in his medical bag. "Drive away, boys."

Sid looked at him through the window. A gun in his bag, the money upstairs in his room, everything covered. A sweet seven hundred bucks for twenty minutes work. "Bastard," he said quietly, and drove away.

"Where we going?" Mel said, sounding groggy.

"Florida. We'll get another car tomorrow. We'll stop at a motel in a few hours so you'll get your rest."

"Forget the motel," Mel said. "We ain't stopping 'till we're ready to heist a car. I'm okay. Just tired. Phil gave me a shot."

Sid nodded and kept driving. "Poor Norma," he said. "Poor kid."

"She'll be all right," Mel said. "She won't serve time."

"Maybe," Sid said.

"What about dough?" Mel said, voice sleepy. "How much you got?"

"About thirty bucks in my wallet. And you?"

"Eight-ten."

"Not good," Sid said, and drove in silence a while. Then he remembered something. "Hey! You put the four hundred for Tony in *your* car, didn't you?" There was no answer except a soft snore. Sid opened the glove compartment with his right hand and felt around, still driving. He found the envelope and pulled it out. The four hundred dollars in twenties and fifties was there.

He shoved the bills into his overcoat pocket and lit a cigarette and put on the radio. It was a hot mambo. Then he thought of Mel and turned off the radio.

About two hours later, Mel roused and said, "We okay?"

"Sure," Sid said.

Mel sighed. "We're not going to make it this time. You hit a cop in that alley."

"We'll make it."

"No, Sid baby. No. This car, me slowed down, things not breaking right."

Sid smoked and said nothing.

"How'd we ever get started?"

Mel mumbled. "How'd we ever get into this?"

Sid kept quiet and soon Mel was sleeping again.

They might make it, Sid thought. There was a chance. Then a quick job, maybe a grand or two, and a new location. Sure, they'd be all right.

His cigarette tasted bad. He threw it out the window and peered into the darkness, driving fast. It sure was a lousy road.



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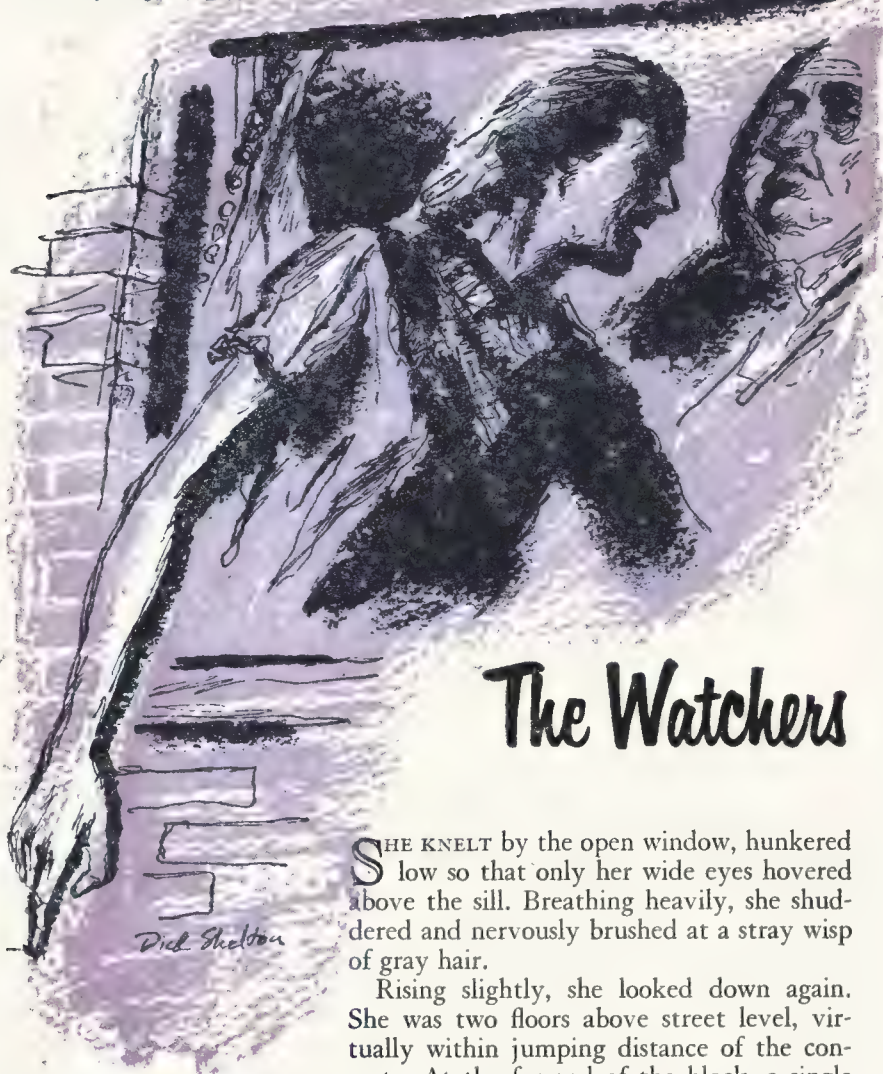
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*"There's a girl getting killed
out there," she said. "Isn't
there anything we can do?"*



The Watchers

SHE KNELT by the open window, hunkered low so that only her wide eyes hovered above the sill. Breathing heavily, she shuddered and nervously brushed at a stray wisp of gray hair.

Rising slightly, she looked down again. She was two floors above street level, virtually within jumping distance of the concrete. At the far end of the block, a single street lamp glowed.

BY WALLY HUNTER

The car was still there. A long, new, two-toned job, all chrome and glitter, hood cavity packed with power. The kind whose windows purr up or down at the touch of a button. On the curb side, the window was down. She could hear them talking, hear every word.

He must have forgotten, or he'd never have left it down, she whispered to herself. She can scream. Any time she wants, she can scream. Then somebody will come. Somebody will have to come!

The woman wrung her hands. Behind her sounded the rhythmic grating of a snore. Sliding away from the window, she arose and went hesitantly to the rumpled bed. I should tell him, she thought. Even if he's angry. It's my duty. What if that were my daughter?

"Hugh," she said quietly. The mound was unmoved.

"Hugh," she persisted.

He rolled suddenly, his movement swaying the sagging bed.

Drawing a deep breath, the woman said, "Hugh, I didn't want to wake you, but I had to. Really, Hugh, I had to."

Sitting upright in one great heaving movement, he shook his head, glaring like an angry walrus. His gray hair was matted with perspiration. Automatically, he swiped one big hand across his damp brow.

"Em," he said dryly, "one of these times I'll slam you right between the eyes. You won't see for a week!"

"Now, Hugh, don't be angry. Please don't be angry."

"Damn you, Em," he said loudly, "it ain't bad enough getting to sleep, you got to wake me up."

Fearfully, the woman glanced over her shoulder. "Please, Hugh, not so loud. Our window's open too. He'll hear you."

"Who'll hear me?" he barked, ignoring her entreaty.

"That car outside the window," she said quietly, hurriedly. "They woke me up talking."

He pulled at his damp undershirt. "So there's a car. So they woke you up. So *you* wake *me* up! Does that make sense?" He slapped his forehead.

"Hugh," she pleaded, "there's a man and girl in that car. He's going to kill her. I heard him. He says he'll kill her. I saw the knife. It's right at her throat, Hugh. Don't you understand? That girl is in trouble. We've got to help."

Hugh was silent. "You going to play cop?" he asked finally. "You going to save the world?" He sat in bed, large and forbidding in the dark, staring at the woman's white face.

"Don't you understand?" she asked. "Don't you see? He'll kill her. I know he'll kill her. I saw the knife."

"I saw the knife, I saw the knife," he parroted. "How in hell did you see the knife? It ain't daylight out there!" He swung an arm wildly in the direction of the window.

"She tried to get away, got part-way out the door once. I saw the knife when the light went on."

Silently, he arose and padded to the window, his bare feet damply slapping the linoleum. He leaned on the sill and peered down. Even at the window there was no breeze, no relief from the cotton-batting air in the room. The woman drifted to his side.

"See," she whispered. "You can see them."

"Who is it?" he asked finally.

"I don't know," she said, encouraged.

"How long they been there?"

She calculated swiftly. "About fifteen minutes. It was terrible. He said it. Real loud and angry. He's going to kill her."

"Well," he asked defensively, "what you want me to do?"

Her words rushed out. "You go right down and get her. You get her out of there. Send him right on his way."

"Now, Em," he said, turning. "I can't do that. I ain't going to mess in that deal. That's *asking* for trouble. How do I know what's going on?"

He paused. "It's probably just a husband and wife deal . . . lot of big talk. You don't catch me sticking my neck out. Me, I'd end up getting it."

"But, Hugh."

"Now dammit, Em," he answered. "I know what I'm talking about. You got to stay out of that stuff. I go down there, they'd both be on me.

You know how that goes. It's always the innocent bystander . . ."

"Hugh, she's in trouble."

"Yeah. Okay. You want me in trouble too? I'd get no thanks, just trouble. You know that."

He wiped his brow. "Look Em, he won't kill anybody. It's just a little private scrap. Nothing serious."

"Hugh! He's got a knife."

"Damn it!" he barked. "You said that. I ain't deaf. But it ain't our business. We got enough troubles without mixing in that." He pointed.

"I'll go call then," she said defiantly.

"And just where'll you call?"

"I'll go down to the McGarrity's."

"Oh, no, you won't," he said. "Not after that last deal. You ain't ever using that phone again. She can get nasty with somebody else for using her phone. I ain't using it, and you won't use it."

"But, Hugh," she said, "if I'm going to call that's the only phone. . . ."

"Dammit, Em. No! You won't use that phone. Now, I'm going to bed. You wake me up again and we'll have trouble. That'll all work out. You'll see." He padded away, crawled in, and pulled up the sheet.

The woman knelt again at the window. The girl in the car was smoking now, drawing hard and deep. Nervously, the cigarette's glowing end flitted in the darkened car, returning again and again to the girl's mouth.

In those glowing moments, the watching woman saw the girl's face, pretty, but wide-eyed with terror. Those same brief flashes gave faint illumination to the knife, long-bladed, slim as a letter opener.

A movement directly opposite the window caught the woman's eye. Instinctively, she drew back, staring into the dark. At the open window in the flat across the trash-littered court was another watcher.

She shifted full attention to the adjoining cluster of apartments. Others were witness to events on the street. At least three other windows were occupied, maybe more.

She wondered if the others could hear. The answer came swiftly. From the parked car, the man's voice rose, heavy and threatening. Her hopes rose.

That would do it. They could hear. Their windows were open. All the windows were open on nights like this. Somebody would help. She looked at the windows, identifying the others.

There was young Evans. He was young and strong. Below him was Marchetti. He wasn't strong, but he could run for help. He could do that.

Looking up, she saw the vague bulk of another man in a second floor window. Bombarger! He was big. He could handle the man in the car. He could do it. There were others. Surely, now, someone would help.

She waited impatiently, growing cramped. Why didn't they do some-

thing? Surely they would help. A half hour passed. They were still talking in the car, but none of the watchers had moved.

Cowards, she thought bitterly. You're cowards. If I were a man, I'd go down. I'd fix him. I wouldn't be afraid.

Finally, she realized it was up to her. She made her decision. I don't care what he says, I'm going down to McGarrity's and phone, she whispered to herself.

Rising, she went to the door, bumping a night table in her hurry, knocking the alarm clock to the floor. Quickly, she knelt, searching in the dark, hands fumbling.

"Em! Dammit, Em!" he roared. "I warned you. You get in this damned bed! Right now!"

"It's just the clock, Hugh, I dropped the clock," she said.

"Don't tell me! You just forget that car or you'll have nothing but trouble."

"Yes, Hugh," she said, slipping into bed.

"Now you stay here!" he ordered.

An hour later she was still awake, straining to hear, wondering if the car was there. But the open window was an idiot's mouth, gaping, revealing nothing.

She lay stiffly, tense with dread at visions of what might even now be happening. At long last, however, she relaxed, giving in. But the girl! What about the girl, she thought.

Maybe it was all right. Maybe it was only a little quarrel. Maybe

that wasn't really a knife. Surely one of the men would help. They could see. They could help. It must be all right. Still . . . She slept.

Dawn eased in the window, lighting the room gradually. When the sun's first rays touched the ceiling, the woman stirred uneasily, then lurched upright.

For a moment she was frozen, looking at the window, remembering. Finally, she eased from the bed, careful not to wake the man. Tip-toeing to the window, she looked down. Only three cigarette butts, white and clean in the gutter, remained as evidence that the car had ever been there.

Then the woman's sharp eyes spotted them. Beads. Beads from a broken necklace. Probably pearls, the woman thought. Turning from the window, she hastily drew on a faded robe and slippers.

I'll just slip down the back way and see, she thought. A minute later she was crossing the court, headed for the bright pearls. She picked up one from the sidewalk.

She saw more further away. Bird-like, she moved, bending and picking, holding the collection tightly in her left hand. At the mouth of a narrow service alley between the buildings, they were scattered in profusion.

Squatting like a coolie, she picked up all within reach. Then she saw the body. The girl was dead. The

woman knew that instantly. Sprawled in the alley's filth, she lay in the universal, grotesque pose of violent death.

Slowly, the woman came erect, teeth chattering. She stared. The girl was on her back, a light blue linen coat flared wide. She lay on it unmoving, like a warrior on his shield.

Her blond, glossy, dishevelled hair framed a face of youth and fine-boned beauty gone gray with death. The contents of an overloaded garbage can hung precariously above the girl's face. The waste from one life threatening to topple on the waste of another.

Suddenly, the woman recoiled, spinning away from the body. Reeling, she bumped heavily against the alley wall. Like an imperilled human fly, she backed around the corner into the light.

Numbly, she staggered into the court beneath the apartments. Momentarily, she paused, sobbing, gulping, shaking. She looked up at the open apartment windows, clustered above her like empty sockets, her mouth working.

"Murderers!" she screamed. "Murderers! You did it . . . you *all* did it! Murderers! Murderers! Murderers! You did it . . . you killed her!"

She was still standing in the court, still screaming when the prowling car arrived.





There wasn't anything else I could do. I'm just like you, I got feelings, even if I am a professional

Killer

BY WILLIAM LOGAN

IT WAS a cool night, that first night a couple of months ago. I was walking home from a movie and I turned the corner onto my block. I saw him walking down the block toward me, and even from far away I knew who he was. He was big and solid, and careful, so that every step he took looked heavy but he didn't make a sound as his feet came down on the pavement.

When he got close to me I could see he was thinking. He didn't even see me, but I waited until we were only a couple of feet apart and said, "Hi, Charlie."

He stopped and blinked, bringing his eyes back into focus. Then he said, "Hi Tommy." "Nice night."

"Cool," I said. "What are you doing around here?"

He waited a second without saying anything, and then he told me: "Come out to see you, Tommy. Mr. Rose says to tell you he'll phone soon. Where you been?"

"Went up to a movie," I said. "Wife had some work to do or something, so I figured I go see a movie by myself."

"Sure," he said.

"What's Mr. Rose want?" I asked.

He didn't answer that. I didn't expect him to. "Well, listen, I got to be going. Got a date I'm gonna be late for."

"I better get on home myself," I said. "I'll see you."

"Sure," Charlie said. He started walking and by the time he was past

me he was thinking again. He wasn't even looking at me when he went by. I walked on another block to my apartment house and got in the elevator and unlocked my door. There wasn't anybody around that I could see. I called: "Sue."

"Tommy?"

"Sure," I said.

"I'm in here," she said. "In the kitchen."

I went in and she was at the sink, washing up some dishes and a couple of glasses.

"You finish up your work?" I asked.

"Sure," she said. "I just fixed myself something to eat. I didn't expect you back so soon."

"I didn't stay for the whole show. The movies were pretty bad."

I went up to her and put my arms around her from behind. I bent down and kissed the top of her head.

"I'm busy," she said.

"The dishes can wait."

I was looking at the glasses she was washing. She looked up and smiled.

"Charlie was here looking for you. We chatted a few minutes."

"I know," I said, "I saw him."

"What did he want?"

"Nothing." I turned her into my arms and she kissed me, pressing her whole body against me. The silverware she had been holding in her hand dropped with a clatter into the sink.

After we broke it up I held onto her hand. "Come on," I told her.

"I'm busy."

"They can wait," I said. "Those movies. You know they give a guy ideas."

She looked at me for a minute. Then she said: "Honest, Tommy. I'm tired. I had a lot of work to do and it's hot in this kitchen. I just don't feel —"

"Baby," I cut in, "I love you."

"I love you too," she said, "but I'm hot and tired. Please, Tommy?"

I pulled her towards me. She didn't resist. I kissed her again. "Okay, baby," I said. "Come on. Come On."

After a minute she came with me. We went into the bedroom and she turned off the light. I reached out and my hand caught her bare arm.

"Here, baby," I whispered. "Come over here . . ."

Next morning we were just lying around in bed at noon, taking things easy, when the phone rang. Sue picked up the receiver.

"That's right," she said. "Sure. Yes, he's here. Just a minute." She put the receiver down on the dresser across the room. It's Charlie Franks," she said.

"I'm not home," I said.

"He says it's important."

I got out of bed slowly and went to the phone. I knew what it was. Charlie's scratchy voice said: "Tommy?"

"That's right."

"Charlie Franks. Come over here right away. Mr. Rose wants to see

you. It's urgent." He hung up. I knew from the way he was talking he was calling from Mr. Rose's place. I put the phone down and started to get dressed. Sue didn't ask where I was going. Just like being a doctor's wife, she was used to calls like that sometimes.

Mr. Rose has a house way over on the East Side in the Fifties. That's a fancy district, up there, and there aren't many private houses left, so his house sticks out like a lighthouse on a dark night. I figure that isn't very smart, but I never said anything; what the hell, that's his business. I'm just a hired hand and I'm happier that way.

I rang the bell and Charlie came to the door. I could see into the living room and there wasn't anybody there but Mr. Rose. Most times, when I get called over, there's a big meeting. I wondered what was up now.

"Hi, Tommy," Charlie said.

"What's up this time?" I asked him.

"The city's hot," he said. "It's pretty damn hot."

"I know that," I said. "If that's all, I might as well have stayed home."

"It's getting hotter. Listen, Tommy, this is pretty important . . ."

I hadn't even known that Mr. Rose was standing next to me until Charlie stopped and looked up. Then

I turned and saw him, the stocky little guy with white hair. "That's right the city's hot," Mr. Rose said, right off. "This new mayor. He thinks he's a big deal; well, it will all swing back the other way. But until it does, we got problems."

"I know," I said.

"We got to be very good boys till the heat is off," he said.

"I'm always a good boy, Mr. Rose," I said. "I do what you tell me and that's all."

"I know that," he said. "But there's something more important." He stopped and looked around, not nervously. It was as if he was trying to make himself proud of what he owned. "There's a leak somewhere in the organization."

"You want me to take care of it, Mr. Rose?" I asked.

"That's right, boy."

"Just tell me who it is and I'll do the rest."

"You're going to find the leak, boy," Mr. Rose said, quietly.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Mr. Rose, I'm hired for one job. I don't go finding people. I take care of them after they've been found. I couldn't know how to begin finding anybody, Mr. Rose."

"You'll take Franks with you."

"Why me?"

Mr. Rose looked straight at me. "The leak is among either your's or Franks contacts," he said.

"I don't talk to anybody, Mr. Rose," I said.

"Either you or Franks did some

talking," he said. "It's got to be one of you. I don't even tell my wife what goes on here."

"And I don't tell mine. You know that, Mr. Rose."

He nodded.

"It could be somebody else," I said. "Big Dave or Bryce."

"No," he said. "Remember the Voss deal?"

"Sure I remember it. Charlie fingered him for me and I took care of him. A very simple deal."

"Well, boy," Mr. Rose said, "nobody but you and Charlie knew about that job. The police dug out the bullet — it landed in the wall behind him, but it was so crushed they can't even tell the calibre of the gun. Only two people know that gun was a .32, boy. You know it and Franks knows it," he paused. "And I hear talk around about Voss being shot. I hear the calibre mentioned."

"That doesn't mean anything," I said. "Suppose somebody knows the calibre of the gun?"

"Of course, boy. It's unimportant. But there have been other leaks. That one pins it down. The leak has to be in your contacts or Franks."

There was nothing else I could do. I said, "Okay."

Mr. Rose looked away from me to Charlie, then back to me.

"I want you to find that leak, boy," Mr. Rose said. "After we find it, we'll decide how to get rid of it."

"Yes, Mr. Rose," I said.

When I walked out of Mr. Rose's

house arm in arm with Charlie, starting out on the job, I felt something. It was gnawing at me even then, but I didn't see it.

It was a job that didn't look too tough, and Charlie was working with me again, and it could mean another grand or so socked away in my account. Just like any other workman starting out, I felt pretty good.

As soon as we were outside Charlie said, "Well, how are we going to work it?"

"You're the boss." We were walking down the street, straight west to Lexington Avenue and the subway. Charlie would go on uptown, and I'd take the downtown train back into Brooklyn.

"Suppose you take my contacts and I take yours," Charlie said. We were on Third Avenue by now. "That way we won't get all messed up with personal stuff. You don't know a lot of my friends and I don't know many of yours. Okay?"

"Fine," I said.

"We'll have to write out lists. Listen, I'll come down to your place tomorrow. I can drive down in my car. I'll do the list tonight sometime, and you do yours. Then we can exchange them tomorrow and talk around a little."

"Okay," I said. "Charlie, I don't know a thing about this finding somebody or whatever it is."

"Leave it to me," he said, "I'll tell you about it tomorrow."

The next morning we were up early. I didn't know what time Charlie would be coming over, and even though we didn't have a hell of a lot to do beforehand I didn't want Sue walking around in a negligee. I mean, I could see Charlie in my shorts — what the hell, we go to Turkish Baths together once in a while, and what's the difference anyhow? But I don't like my wife walking around in a negligee or a nightgown in front of company.

We were all done with breakfast and the dishes, though, and I was listening to the radio with one ear and trying to read a science-fiction book with the other half of my attention, when the doorbell rang. I went and opened the door and Charlie said, "Hi."

"You got your list?" I asked.

"Sure." "You?"

I'd wrote one up after breakfast and told him so. He said, "Your wife around?"

"Sure, she is." Then I got it. "Hey, wait a minute. You don't mean that you think Sue could be—"

"You told me I was the boss, I'd teach you," Charlie said. "Okay, here's the first thing you learn. In a deal like this you don't trust anybody. I don't trust you, you don't trust me."

I went in and told Sue to go to a movie or go up to Mrs. Tomas' place for a while, and to come back in a couple of hours. She looked at me, and she gave Charlie a long stare, but she went.

Charlie and I went into the living room and sat down on the couch. I gave him my list and he looked it over while I ran my eye down his. Most of the names on Charlie's list were women. Well that figured. Charlie is a big, handsome guy, and he's the careful type, so he's saved up a lot of money and the only thing he spends it on is his women. He's not married, like me, and of course he don't know what he's missing, but maybe it would take some girl like Sue to show him. That's what I was thinking as I looked at the list.

"Now," I said, "what the hell do I do from here?" "I just can't call these people up and ask them if they're spilling to the cops."

"That's the difference between your work and mine," Charlie said. He told me what to do.

"I'll start it off tomorrow," I said.

Charlie shook his head. "What's wrong with today?" "Right now? I can take this list of yours and get going; you start off right away and we'll get it cleaned up fast."

So that afternoon I called two of the women on Charlie's list and made dates for that night and the next one. I took them out, but they were both stupid blonde types. Charlie went a lot for the showgirl type, if you know what I mean. I couldn't figure Charlie talking to them, and they didn't look like they'd remember anything you told them anyhow, so I crossed them off my list.

Next day I called the next one,

and the day after that another one. After it had been going on for a while like that I called up this Latin type of babe. Chiquita. I took her out to a club and she looked a little sharper than the other ones; she was a dark-haired babe, a little bouncy spitfire type. And when I started talking about the crime wave and so on she began to look interested, so I pushed it a little farther.

"You take this Voss thing for instance," I said. "A guy shot dead in his own apartment and the cop's can't find a thing."

"It was a terrible thing," she said. "Terrible."

"You know, they even found the bullet and they can't track the killer down from that."

"They ought to be able to do something."

"Sure," I said, "but they're not doing a thing. Here they got this bullet, and they're just stuck with it, can't find the gun or anything."

"It's terrible," she said. "There just can't be — well, I don't know much about this kind of thing, but there just can't be that many .32 guns around."

"Sure," I said. I had it. I talked to her for awhile but I was too excited. I'd known all along it had to be one of Charlie's contacts. I faked some kind of a deal and put her in a cab back to her place and told her I'd call her later. Hell, I told myself, I'd call her later, all right. *Last* call.

I flagged another cab for myself. I deserved a little celebration.

I gave the cabbie the address and he swung around and headed for the bridge back into Brooklyn.

I got out right in front of my apartment house, and I took the elevator upstairs and unlocked my door. There wasn't any light and I couldn't hear a thing. I called; "Sue."

Nobody answered. I closed the door quietly and walked softly into the apartment, figuring she was in bed asleep. I turned the hall light on and walked quietly up to the bedroom door. I pushed it open.

She was in bed, all right. But she wasn't asleep and she wasn't alone. There was a man with her, and the two of them were a tangle of arms and legs and bodies that suddenly stilled when I snapped the bedroom light on.

Sue's face was perfectly blank and calm. The man's face was quiet and sure and I looked at it for a long time. The man was Charlie.

Nobody said anything as I moved into the room.

"Get up, Charlie," I said. The gun was burning my hand.

Very slowly he got out of bed and stood there facing me. Sue didn't move. She didn't do a thing.

I said, "You know what I'm going to do?"

Charlie said, "You can't." But his face went white.

"Both of you." I said. I looked at Sue. She didn't even bother to

hold the sheet up to cover herself.

My finger was tightening on the trigger, when it hit me that doing it here in my own home wasn't very smart.

Mr. Rose had other gunnies.

I held the gun on them and dialed

Mr. Rose's number, in the Fifties.

When Mr. Rose says to find a leak, you find it. All the same, I miss those sounds coming from the kitchen. I don't like it so quiet around the house, wonder if the Latin babe can cook?



The Strange Case of the Man Who Broke into the Wrong House

The strange case of the man who broke into the wrong house was heard recently in Providence, R. I., Superior Court. Anthony Volpe, 29, explained that he and a friend had borrowed \$150 from a finance company. The friend failed to pay his share and Volpe had to pay the entire debt. To get even, Volpe decided to break into what he thought was his friend's house and take out some articles.

Volpe entered the house through a window and took out a radio and a chair. He went back into the house and awakened his "friend" to tell him what he had done. But it wasn't his friend. It was a stranger. Because he had no previous record, the court suspended sentence and placed Volpe on probation.

Noisy Greeting

In Chicago, burglars broke into the Michigan Electronics, Inc., plant. They were greeted by a pleasant male voice: "Good evening, gentlemen. May I remind you that this place is electronically guarded? I suggest that you turn around and disappear."

There was a pause. Then the voice shouted: "Help, police, police! Thieves, burglars! Help, police!"

Next came a woman's shrieks, followed by the wail of a siren and alarm bells. Nearby residents heard the noise and called police, but the burglars had fled.

Paul Grossi, engineer for the company which manufactures tape recorders, told officers that he and another engineer had rigged up the device "as a gag." The burglary attempt was its first test.

Hot and Cold

Nassau County, N. J., authorities have been looking for the thief who entered a warehouse and made off with a series of pin-up-girl calendars. The intruder returned the following night and stole a crateful of electric fans.



If she'd only left me alone, I'd still be okay. I wouldn't be where I am now . . .

Job with a Future

BY RICHARD WELLES

EVERYTHING would have been all right if only the old lady had left me alone. But no, she couldn't do that. She had to keep nagging and yelling at me, night and day, until I don't know what.

Maybe it was old man Snyder who started the whole thing. I'm not

sure about that but I do know one thing — he had no squawk coming. That much I know for sure. I'd been working for him in the store ever since I quit school last year and he had no reason to beef. I did just about everything in the store, worked behind the counter, made deliveries and stuff like that. I worked just as hard as he did, maybe harder, and all I got for it was a lousy thirty bucks a week. Actually I was making nothing at all — the old lady used to cop half of the thirty every week for my board.

Snyder is the kind who's never satisfied with anything or anybody and it seems to me that he always has to have his big mouth open. I don't know why but he just *has* to. Well,

this one morning I come into work and I'm late. I'd been to a party the night before and I'm not feeling so hot, so, when he starts shooting off his mouth, I say, "Nuts to you, fat man," and I quit.

He's plenty sore and, just to show me what a regular bastard he can be, he gets on the phone and calls my old lady. He tells her he fired me because a lot of his stock has disappeared since I started working for him. I don't know anything about him phoning cause I've already left the store but as soon as I get home the old lady starts in on me. She gives me hell and plenty of it. She knows that Snyder is a damn liar but you can bet that that's not what's bothering her. All she cares about is her lousy fifteen bucks, and she lets me know about it, too. I tell her not to worry, that I'm getting a better job anyhow, and she says that I'd damn well better hurry up about it.

The next day I make the rounds of a few places where I hear they've been hiring but they all hit me with the same thing — references. That's really funny. If I know Snyder he won't give me a reference to hell. I don't worry too much at first, though, but then a week goes by and I haven't even got the smell of a job. That's still not so bad, but every night when I go home the same thing starts all over again. She tells me that I'm a lousy bum just like my father was, and she says I'll wind up like him, too — dying broke in a

gutter. She doesn't have to talk to me like that. She knows I'm trying. But she just doesn't give a damn.

Well, I'm down to my last two bucks and I decide to spend it on an *employment wanted* ad in the paper. I get Jake, who lives across the hall, to help me write it out. It runs for three days in the paper and it reads: *Ambitious youth 17, wants position with a future — anything considered. Box 374.* The ad looks pretty nice in the paper but the results it brings are just nothing, so it's beginning to look like I'm never going to find a job.

I guess maybe that's why I listen so carefully when Fats McGregor starts talking to me. Fats is three years older than me and he's got quite a reputation around town. He's one guy it pays to stay on good terms with, and one of the reasons is that switch-blade that he carries around with him. He never bothers with me much, except maybe to nod hello once in a while, but, this night, I'm walking home and he calls me over to where he's sitting in a '52 Ford.

"Hi, Fats," I say. "Whose car?"

"It's mine, Tommy. You like?"

I tell him it's real great and he says that it's not bad but that he's going to trade it in on a new model soon. I tell him that that's swell and I say that he must be doing all right for himself.

"Well, Tommy, I can't complain. But what about you? You look pretty damn sad, kid. What is it,

your broad leave you hanging in the air or something?"

"No," I tell him. "It's just that I quit my job and they're not so easy to find right now."

His lips pull back into a grin that reveals a mouthful of bad teeth and he shakes his head at me.

"Hell, kid, that's the last thing you got to worry about. Come on. I'll buy you a drink."

I hop in beside him and we drive over to Big Al's. On the way over we get talking and I tell him how the old lady is giving me a rough time and all. He thinks the whole thing is as funny as hell but, even though I don't like his laughing, I know better than to say anything about it. Big Al's is over on Bleecker Street and I'd been there a dozen times before, but, when we go in this time, Fats steers me right past the bar to the back. There's a door there that I'd never seen before and Fats takes a key from his pocket and unlocks it. We both walk in and he reaches out and snaps on a light.

Man, what a setup! There are chairs all around the room and a big sofa pushed over against the wall. In the middle of the room there's a table with a radio sitting on it along with a deck of cards. Over in one corner is a cupboard and Fats goes over to it and takes out two glasses and a fifth of whisky. He pours us each a drink and comes over and sits beside me on the sofa, putting the bottle on the floor in front of us.

"Well, Tommy, do you like it? All the comforts of home, hey?"

"Jesus!" I say. "This is all right. You live here, Fats?"

"No," he tells me. "I just entertain my friends here, you know what I mean? Me and Al have kind of an understanding. I've done him a few favors, see, and he lets me use this place whenever I want. It comes in handy sometimes."

The whisky is real stuff, nothing like the cheap blend the gang drinks. It goes down just like Coke but it's got a real kick to it. We sit around and drink some more and Fats asks me if I still hang around with the same guys. I tell him no, that I haven't seen them for a long time and he says that I'm smart, because they're just punks anyway. Then he asks what I'm planning on doing and, when I tell him I'll keep hunting around for a job, he starts to laugh again. I guess I had a lot more to drink than I figured. I turn to him and ask what's so goddamned funny. I sit there, hoping like hell that I won't have to go with him, but if he's hot he doesn't show it. Instead he says that a friend of his might be able to give me a job, and he asks if I can drive. I tell him I can, and I ask what kind of job.

"Nothing you can't handle, kid. He just hits gas stations and small stores that stay open late. You can make yourself a bundle, Tommy. All you have to do is drive. Well, kid, what about it?"

I don't know what to say. I mean,

I've been around with the gang and all, but this is different. I sit there, saying nothing for a moment, and then I take a big gulp of whisky and turn to Fats.

"Okay," I say. "Who's your friend?"

He starts to laugh like hell at that, and he goes over to the cupboard again and takes something. When he turns around I can see that it's a gun.

"Come on, kid," he says. "Let's go to work."

We go out and hop into the car and start out of town. We stop once at a puddle and Fats gets out and smears the car's plates with mud. Then we cruise around a bit and finally we spot this gas station that looks pretty good. We pull the car up about fifty feet past it and I slide over behind the wheel when Fats gets out.

"Keep the motor running, kid. This won't take long."

He's gone, and suddenly I'm sweating all over. I'm scared as hell and I want out real bad. I'm so scared, my teeth are slamming against each other, but I'm not going to chicken out now. I just shut my eyes and grab the wheel hard. It seems like a year but finally I feel a bump as he jumps in beside me. I put my foot on the gas and we beat it out of there fast. Fats isn't worrying about anything. He's sitting there, laughing to himself, and counting a real bundle of money.

"You should have seen it, kid. It was a cinch. One of the punks tried

to get hard, so I split his head for him."

"How much did we get?" I ask.

He tells me: a hundred and forty bucks. I'm wondering how much I'll get when he reaches over and stuffs a pile of dough into my pocket.

"There, kid. Seventy bucks. That's more than Snyder ever paid you, huh?"

And the old lady told me I'd be like my father — dying broke, in a gutter! But I play it smart. "That's too much, Fats," I say. "All I did was drive."

"Don't be stupid, kid; that's the way we split. Don't worry. You've got the tough part. How'd you feel?"

I tell him I was scared as hell and he says not to let it worry me. We head back into town after we clean off the license plates, and we're cutting back to Big Al's when it happens. This crazy old guy jumps right in front of us and, before I can stop, we slam him about fifty feet. Fats is yelling at me to get going but, just as we start moving again, I hear the siren behind us.

We hit the corner fast and tear through the streets, but the cops stay right with us. Fats is screaming at the cops like they can hear him, and he's waving the gun back and forth, wanting like hell to use it. Then Fats is quiet, suddenly, and the next thing I know he's sprawled all over me. I look down and I see the little hole in his neck.

Then two things happen at once.

I feel a pain in my shoulder, like I was burnt or something. At the same time I look into the mirror and I see the cruiser take the sidewalk and smack hard into a brick wall.

An alley comes up and I turn in fast and get out. I'm real scared, but I don't forget Fats' money or his gun. It's dark, dark as hell, and I take off, over the fences, putting plenty of distance between me and the alley. Finally I fall off this fence and I know I can't go any farther. There's a garage at the end of the

yard and I stagger down to it and get in through the little door in the back. Inside, there's a car and I open the front door and fall in across the seat. My jacket's soaked through with blood and I know I'm hurt pretty bad. I kind of want to cry but I'm not going to — not now.

If she'd only left me alone I would have been all right. I'm dying now and it's all her fault. I don't really care, though. I showed her — I showed her she was wrong. I'm not in a gutter, and I'm not broke neither.



Dead Man Winner

Two employees of a Mineola, N. Y., funeral home were charged recently with stealing seven winning pari-mutuel tickets worth \$2,160. The tickets, police said, were taken from the pockets of a man who fell dead at Belmont Park race track. The men were apprehended while trying to cash the tickets.

The Hard Way

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, three men told arresting officers they stoned a U. S. postoffice so they would be sent to a federal prison and taught a trade.

Delayed Bullet

Back in 1893 Henry Ziegland, of Honey Grove, Tex., jilted his sweetheart. She committed suicide. Her brother shot Ziegland, but the bullet only grazed his face and buried itself in a tree on Ziegland's property. The brother, in the belief that he had killed Ziegland, also committed suicide.

Twenty years later, in 1913, Ziegland attempted to cut down the tree with an ax, but found the job too difficult. He used dynamite, and the explosion sent the bullet through his head and killed him.

Sleep Without Dreams

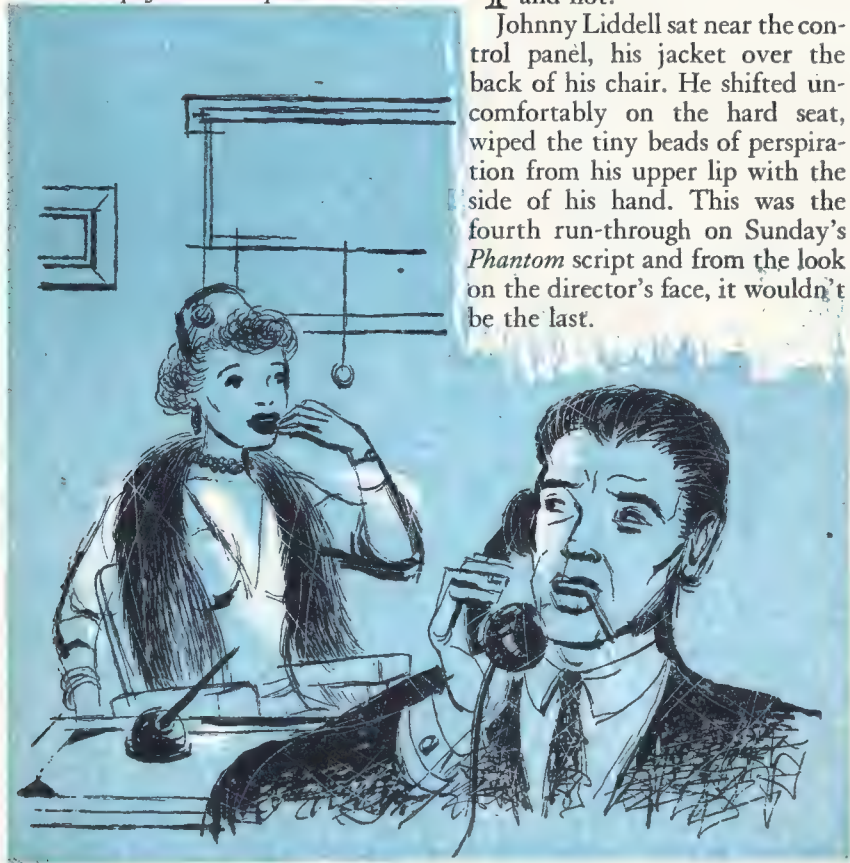
A Johnny Liddell Story

BY FRANK KANE

*It wasn't Liddell's kind of job, at first.
Then the cops found a corpse . . .*

THE CONTROL room was close and hot.

Johnny Liddell sat near the control panel, his jacket over the back of his chair. He shifted uncomfortably on the hard seat, wiped the tiny beads of perspiration from his upper lip with the side of his hand. This was the fourth run-through on Sunday's *Phantom* script and from the look on the director's face, it wouldn't be the last.



Hal Lewis looked up from his marked script, checked the time notations in the margin, shook his head. He glared through the plate glass window at the small group of actors spaced around the two mikes in the studio beyond.

"Pretty sad for a gang that's been doing the same show for over six years," he growled to no one in particular. He jabbed at a button on the panel in front of him. "It's still no good, fellows."

The groans and growls in the studio came through the amplifier into the control room.

Lewis waved for quiet. "Let's take it again from the top." He slipped his script to page one, ran his eye down the pencilled notations. "Manny, it's all right to lisp playing the mobster. But when you're supposed to be fingering the Phantom for the cops, you're supposed to say 'He's one of them,' not 'He's one of us!'" He barked a few other criticisms into the mike. "Let's take it."

"He's one of us, not one of them."

It was Lewis's voice but Liddell, watching, felt like a runner caught off first base by the old hidden-ball trick.

Lewis cut their laughter dead. He was sore. "All right, comedians. Want to get home tonight? I said let's take it!"

He glanced sidewise at Liddell. "Lousy mimics I have on my hands as well as lousy actors. Be glad you work mostly with corpses." He frowned. "Though it's a live one I

asked you to come see me about tonight."

The fifth rehearsal went according to the director's liking; he signalled an okay to the cast touching the tip of his forefinger and the tip of his thumb. He waited until the small knot of men around the mike broke up and headed for the exits for a fast smoke.

"Sorry to make you sit through all that, Liddell." He reached for a pack of cigarettes on the control panel, held it out to the private detective. "They're not usually that sloppy." He waited until Liddell had lit his cigarette. "Kurt Davis is beginning to get a little stale, I'm afraid. Playing the same part for six years can do that to the best of them."

"He the fellow that played the lead?"

Lewis grinned. "Let's say he has the lead. Confidentially, most of those guys in there with him could play rings around him." He turned to the engineer. "We won't be doing a dress before the show, Lou. They're as ready as they're ever going to be. Want to grab a cup of coffee?"

The engineer was a tall, thin man with unruly black hair and the dark stubble of a beard along the line of his jaw. He consulted his watch. "It's only four. We've got two hours to air time. The cast know we're skipping the dress?"

Lewis shrugged. "I'll tell them when they come back in." He waited until the engineer had turned off the

panel, pulled himself to his feet. "Better get back by 5:30. Some of those levels need checking."

The thin man scowled at him, stamped through the iron, sound-proof door.

The director sighed. "Everybody's a prima donna in this business, Liddell. You can't tell the cast they're reading a line wrong and you can't tell the engineer he's got to check his levels without hurting their feelings. You know what that makes me? A fourteen-carat bastard."

Liddell grinned his sympathy. "Everybody has troubles." He studied the rumpled hair, the tired droop to the man's lips, the reddened eyes. "You look like you could stand a rest, Hal."

Lewis nodded absently. "That's what the doc said. After tonight's show, I'm taking off for a three-week trip. Maybe by the time I get back my understudy will have figured out something to do with that ham Davis. He's taking years off my life."

"If he's that bad, why don't you replace him?"

The director screwed his face up into a grimace. "And have every damn brat in the country boycott the program? Haven't you ever heard the little so-and-sos imitating him every place you go? You take that tag line 'Justice Must Prevail' off the show and you'd have no show. It would be just as if the Lone Ranger stopped saying 'Hi-Ho Silver.' Our headache is that Davis'

voice is so damn distinctive, we'd never get away with a substitution. They'd spot it in a minute."

Liddell considered it, nodded. "I never thought about it, but I guess you're right. I'm certainly no fan of the Phantom's, but I'd know that bellow of his any place."

The director nodded sadly, chain-lit a cigarette from the half consumed one he held in his hand. "But I didn't get you down here to discuss my lead." He licked at his lips, seemed to be fumbling for words. "Libby won't be making the trip with me, Liddell."

Liddell raised his eyebrows, said nothing.

The other man raked at his hair with clenched fingers. "She can't get away. She does the lead in that soap on Columbia and she's written in every day for the next six weeks." He sucked at the cigarette with short, nervous puffs. "That's part of the racket, and —" He looked at Liddell, then dropped his eyes. "Who the hell am I kidding? She didn't want to go with me. She could have taped the next twenty sequences if she wanted to." He wiped the dampness along his jowls with the back of his hand. "I think we've had it, Johnny. I think I'm getting dealt out."

Liddell looked uncomfortable, muttered a few words of sympathy. "Another guy?"

The director nodded. "It figures. But I don't know who." He got up, paced the narrow confines of the

booth. "I found out about it pretty much by accident." He stopped near Liddell's chair, crushed out his cigarette in a metal ashtray. "Like I said, she does the lead in an across-the-board soap. It's on from three-thirty to four every weekday. From force of habit, I tune it in. No reason — just to see how she's doing. You understand?"

Liddell nodded.

Lewis scratched at his head again. "Two weeks ago, I happened to catch a sequence and Libby fluffed twice in one of her long speeches. I figured I'd have a little fun with her, tease her about the fluffs. When the show went off the air, I called over to Columbia and asked for her studio. They seemed surprised that I didn't know the show had been on tape for the past few weeks."

He sat down, stared at Liddell. "She never mentioned it to me, Liddell. She never mentioned that for two weeks, every afternoon she was spending a couple of hours away from the house. Where? Who with?" He jabbed another cigarette into his mouth, lit it with a shaking hand. "It's been driving me crazy, Liddell. I've got to know."

"Where do I come in?"

The director leaned over, put his hand on the detective's arm. "You're going to find out for me. I'll be away for weeks. She won't have to hide."

Liddell shook his head. "That's not my field, Hal. You know that. That takes a special kind of talent, a kind I don't have."

Lewis licked at his lips. A pleading note came into his voice. "You're my friend, Liddell. I don't know where else to turn."

Liddell massaged his brow with the tips of his fingers. "Anything else I can do for you, I'd do in a minute. But I won't do you any good and I wouldn't do myself any good if I started peeking through keyholes or over transoms, Hal." He stared at the sweat-shiny face of the other man. "I know a good reliable man in that field, though. I'll have him drop by and see you."

"You won't change your mind, Liddell? Price is no object and —"

Liddell got up, clapped the other man on the shoulder. "Price doesn't come into it, chum. I'm just not the man for the job. But I'll see to it that you do get the man who is." He took his jacket off the back of the chair, shrugged into it. "Don't look so gloomy. Maybe it isn't what you think."

"How do you think she's been spending her afternoons? Learning to crochet?" Lewis pulled the half-smoked butt from between his lips, added it to the pile on the ashtray in front of him. "I've got to know who it is, Liddell. I've got to know!"

Johnny Liddell had almost forgotten Hal Lewis's problems two weeks later when he walked into his office. The pert little redhead behind the reception desk grinned as he pushed through the glass door.

"Anything new?" was his stock greeting.

She tossed her head in the direction of the private office. "Company." She rolled her eyes lasciviously. "Real lush."

"How come you put her in there?"

Pinky grinned at him. "She said she was a friend of yours. I wouldn't dare have a friend of yours sit on the dirty old customer's bench in the dingy old reception room."

Liddell growled at her under his breath, walked over to the door to the private office, pushed it open.

Libby Lewis was a natural ash blonde. She wore her hair clipped close until it looked almost like a halo around her face. Her eyes were slanted, green. Her mouth was a vivid slash of color in the cocoa brown of her face. She wore no hat, and a pale green sweater did an indifferent job of disguising outstanding assets in her profession. Her lips parted, showing a perfect set of gleaming teeth. She got up, walked toward him with outstretched hand.

"Johnny. I'm so glad to see you." Her hand was cool, soft. She brought with her a clean, fresh smell. Standing, she was tall for a girl. Her waist was small, the fullness of her skirt hinted at rounded hips, long shapely legs. "I hope you didn't mind my coming here?"

"It's the nicest thing that's happened to me all week." He led her back to the customer's chair, walked around the desk, dropped into his armchair. "I'd like to think it was

my fatal fascination that brought you, but something tells me it wasn't."

A momentary frown marred the placidity of her forehead. "I wish it were just a social visit. It isn't." She chewed on her full lower lip for a moment. "I'm in a jam, Johnny. I need advice."

"I wish you had talked to me before you got into the jam," Liddell told her. He reached down into his bottom drawer, brought up a half filled bottle of bourbon. "Better late than never, though."

"You knew Hal was away, of course?" The detective walked across the room to where a water cooler stood humming to itself against the wall. He drew two paper cups, spilled some water into them and returned to the desk. "He's been touring the country visiting old friends along the net, holding a few auditions, taking it easy." She laced her fingers in her lap, stared at them. "I'm dreading the day he comes back."

Liddell spilled some bourbon into the cups on top of the water. He handed one to the girl. "The bloom off the romance?"

Her eyes were wide, clear, made no attempt to evade his. "It has been for a long, long time, Johnny. I never did anything about it because I had my work to keep me occupied. Hal had his, and we just didn't get into each other's way." She sipped at the drink, coughed. "It's different now."

Liddell perched on the corner of the desk. "How?"

"I've found a man I really love, Johnny. The man I thought Hal was when I married him."

"You made a mistake once. How do you know you're not making another one?"

"I know. Kurt's not as good an actor as Hal was." She chuckled. "We don't fool ourselves. Kurt's strictly a one-part man. When the Phantom goes off the air, so does Kurt. And we don't mind, Johnny. Both of us have had it with radio. It doesn't leave you much time to live."

"Kurt?" Liddell set his drink down. "Kurt Davis?"

"The fellow who plays the name role in the Phantom every Sunday. Hal directs him."

Liddell nodded, picked up his drink, emptied the cup in one swallow. "I'll bet Hal will love that."

The blonde sipped at her drink. "They hate each other. Kurt has been wanting to go to Hal and tell him he's got to give me my freedom. I wanted to wait. I know Hal's pride." She shrugged helplessly. "Now I guess it's too late. He's been having me followed. Now that he knows, he'll never let me go."

Liddell crushed the paper cup into a ball, threw it at the waste basket. "When does Hal get back?"

"Sometime this week. He's scheduled to do the Phantom on Sunday."

Liddell walked around the desk, dropped into his chair. He picked a silver pencil from the desk, rolled it between his thumb and forefinger. "You've been pretty stupid about

the whole mess," he told her bluntly. "You should have gone to Hal right at the beginning."

"I couldn't. He wouldn't understand."

"I suppose he'll understand better when he gets it in a report from a private detective agency?" He slammed the pencil on the top of the desk. "You should have known you couldn't get away with it."

The blonde's full lips drooped. "It never occurred to me he'd call the station. I knew he checked up on me every day by tuning into the show, but —"

The telephone jangled on the desk at Liddell's elbow. He scooped it from its cradle, held it to his ear. "Yeah?" His lower lip sagged. "When?" The instrument chattered at him again. "Call the police. I'll be right over." He dropped the instrument back on its hook, stared at the girl. "Hal's home."

"He is?" Some of the color had drained from her face. "You said something about the police. What's happened?"

"Kurt Davis is dead. He tried to kill Hal, but Hal killed him first. In self defense."

The blonde shrank back into the chair, tried to squeeze her little fist into her mouth.

Sergeant Eddie Neal of Homicide opened the door in response to Johnny Liddell's knock. He was a tired-looking, middle-aged man in a

rumpled blue suit and a battered grey fedora stuck on the back of his head. He seemed surprised to see Liddell.

"What's the gimmick? You following the meat wagon these days?" Neal shifted his bulk from one foot to the other.

"Hal Lewis called me after it happened. He wanted me to come over."

Neal shrugged, stepped aside. "He's inside. The study."

The director sat on an oversized couch at the far end of the room. He seemed incapable of pulling his eyes away from a blanket-draped bulge in the center of the room. As he watched, two white-coated attendants from the coroner's office transferred the body to a stretcher and strapped it on. While they were obtaining an initialled release from one of the Homicide team, Liddell walked over to Lewis.

The director's face was damp and gleamed wetly in the half light. His eyes moved from the corpse to Liddell's face, he licked at his lips. "He's dead, Liddell," he muttered unnecessarily.

The homicide man turned back from the form he was initialling, grinned humorlessly. "It's a cinch he ain't wearing that hole in the head for a decoration." He eyed Liddell coldly. "You're the private eye, Liddell, eh?" He said it as though it left a bad taste in his mouth.

Liddell nodded.

The homicide man put his hand out. "You got the report?"

"What report?"

The homicide man nodded to Lewis. "Man here says he's had you watching his wife for the past couple weeks. Don't he get a report?"

"Not from me. I don't peep key-holes. He had another agency on that job." He watched while Neal ambled over.

"What's your job here, then?"

Liddell dug his cigarettes from his pocket, stuck one in his mouth. "Being a friend. It looks like he might need one."

"Lay off the guy, Mike," Neal told the other Homicide man. "He's okay. He works pretty close with the Inspector's office." He turned to Liddell. "This is Mike Herrnan, Johnny. He's just been transferred over to us from Central Office. He's teamed with me."

Liddell nodded. "Glad to know you. Mind filling me in?"

Herrnan looked to his partner, drew a nod. "Your friend here calls us. We pick up the squeal. Says he's killed his wife's lover. Guy pulled a gun on him first, he says, so it's self defense."

Hal Lewis swabbed at his face with a balled-up handkerchief. "That's right, Johnny. The guy called me, cussed me out for having a tail on Libby. He dared me to come over, said we'd settle it once and for all." He swabbed at his face again. "I picked up an old .38 I had around." He nodded in the direction of a table on which lay two guns. "As soon as I walk in Davis' door, he pulls a gun

and aims it at me." Lewis shook his head, "I don't know what happened then. All I know is that I started shooting and when it was all over he was lying there."

Neal squinted at the man in the chair. "You weren't taking much of a chance, were you?" He looked up at Liddell. "The other guy's gun was loaded with blanks." The eyes rolled back to Lewis. "Two of them were fired. He had four holes in him — one in the head. That's the big one."

Lewis dry-washed his hands. "I didn't know his gun was loaded with blanks. All I know is he started aiming at me. So I —" He looked from face to face, didn't find what he was looking for. "I got a right to defend myself against a guy who was breaking up my home."

Herrnan pulled a dog-eared leather notebook from his pocket, wet the tip of his index finger, flipped through the pages. "You say you got a call from the dead man today, daring you to come over. Right?"

Hal Lewis nodded, watched the homicide man warily.

"This private eye you had watching your wife. What was his name?"

Lewis looked at Liddell, got no encouragement. "Ted Derbers. He has an agency at —"

Neal grunted. "We know all about Derbers." He looked sideways at Liddell. "The kind of guy that's giving the racket a bad name. Wire tapping and all the dirty tricks. Right, Liddell?"

Liddell shrugged. "He's not my kind of op."

Herrnan chewed on the cuticle of his thumb. "If Derbers was doing a good job, he probably had a tap on the phone here." He looked thoughtfully at Lewis. "In that case, he could verify what you just said."

Lewis nodded eagerly. "Call him and see."

"We'll do better than that, mister. We'll invite him to drop down to headquarters and play us all the stuff he's picked up. You wouldn't object to that, would you?"

"Does he have a choice?" Liddell said.

"No."

"In that case, what are we waiting for?"

Neal grinned. "You weren't figuring on joining the party, were you, Liddell? It's strictly by invitation — and you're not invited."

The blonde was still in his office when Liddell got back. Her eyes were puffy, showed signs of crying. She jumped out of the chair when he opened the door, her eyes searching his face.

"It's pretty bad, baby," he shook his head. "Hal went over to Kurt's place, killed him." He walked around the desk, dropped wearily into his chair. "He told the police Kurt had called him and threatened him, dared him to come over for a showdown."

"But if it was self defense —"

"Kurt never called him." He opened the desk drawer, brought out an opened pack of cigarettes, dumped one on the desk, held the pack out to the girl, drew a shake of the head. "Hal had a private eye watching you. You know that." He lit the cigarette, blew a feathery stream of smoke ceilingward. "The guy he hired is a wire tap artist. He put a bug on Kurt's wire. Kurt never called all day, and he didn't leave the house."

Libby sat down hard, her eyes wide, staring. "Then — then, it was murder?"

Liddell speared a flake of tobacco from the tip of his tongue. "It looks that way. You see, Derbers — that's the wire tap guy — told me he didn't have a single call from Kurt's place. But there was one to Kurt. From Hal."

The blonde chewed on her finger. "What about?"

"Hal told Kurt he was on his way over to kill him. That he had all the evidence he needed to claim the Unwritten Law and that's what he'd been waiting for all these years."

"He hated him. He always hated him. But I never knew —"

Liddell leaned back, raked his hair with clenched fingers. "As soon as Homicide gets those records, Hal will be charged, Libby. My guess is they'll try to make a Murder One charge stick."

"Can they?"

Liddell shrugged. "They can try. They have all the elements — pre-

meditation, motive, opportunity. They can make a real college try at it."

The blonde got up from her chair. "I've got to go to him, Johnny."

Liddell looked at her.

She shook her head. "I'm his wife. And I guess I'm as much to blame as he is. Thanks for everything."

Liddell sat at his desk for minutes after the girl had left, staring at the door. Finally, he crushed out his cigarette, picked up his hat from the corner of the desk and left.

Frank Cole, producer of the *Phantom* for Seasweet Tuna, looked like a stroke on its way to happen. Thick veins stood out on his neck, his cheeks had assumed a purple hue, his eyeballs threatened to pop from their sockets as he tried to speak into three phones at once.

Johnny Liddell stood by the window, listened sympathetically while the producer tried to assure the cast that the show would go on as scheduled, calm the sponsor with a promise of an adequate replacement and browbeat an assistant into stepping up auditions for a new *Phantom*.

When he finally got off the phone, he leaned back, wiped at his forehead. He jabbed at a button on the base of the phone. When his secretary's voice came through the intercom, he told her he'd take no more calls.

"What the hell is going on, Liddell?" he started. "All I know is the

police called the agency told us Kurt was dead and Hal under arrest. What happened?"

Liddell shrugged. "Hal claims Kurt was playing house with Libby. He defended the honor of his household."

Cole looked thoughtful. "I suppose there's no accounting for tastes, but I wouldn't figure Kurt Davis to be Libby's dream boy." He picked up a pencil, doodled on a desk pad. "He wasn't in her league. Not that Hal was either; but he got her before she blossomed out." He looked up. "Picking Kurt to follow Hal would be like stepping out of the frying pan into the fire."

"How so?"

Cole shrugged, resumed shading his doodle. "Libby could write her own ticket in Hollywood. Neither Hal or Kurt could get into a movie studio on a pass. The only thing that's ever held her back was Hal."

"What was wrong with Kurt? I thought he was a good enough actor."

"Typed, I guess. He's been booming that 'Justice Must Prevail' tag for so long, the minute his name is announced everybody yells 'Justice Must Prevail' and it breaks up the show. Hell, we can't even use him on our other programs because he's so identified with that character."

"Could he do a job on another show? Like imitations maybe?"

"How'd you know? The guy's a good mimic. Could keep the whole cast in stitches. Hal complained

more than once about Kurt delaying rehearsals by doing take-offs of the other players."

"You think Hal disliked Kurt enough to kill him? Aside from his messing around with Libby, I mean."

Cole shrugged. "Who knows? Guys like Hal take this business pretty seriously. He always thought Kurt was smelling up the Phantom, that with another lead he could do real things with it." He smiled wryly. "Maybe it was half for the honor of his household and half for the good of the show."

The clock on the night table said four o'clock. Liddell got up on his elbow, glared at the telephone, but it continued to shrill at him. He reached over, yanked it from its cradle.

"Johnny? This is Libby. I'm downstairs. Can I come up?"

Liddell pushed back the covers, picked up the clock, held it to his ear. It was ticking. "You know what time it is?"

"I know." There was a pause. "I just left Police Headquarters. Johnny, Hal is dead."

"He's what?"

"He's dead. They notified me about an hour ago, and sent a car for me. He must have had some pills with him. When the keeper went past his cell, he —"

"I'm in 4B."

He stuffed his legs into his pants,

pulled a bathrobe over his pajama tops. In less than ten minutes the girl was knocking at his door. The cocoa color of her face was a yellowish tint in the half light, she wore no make-up but lipstick. She closed the door behind her, leaned against it. Her full breasts rose and fell spasmodically. "He's dead, Johnny. He killed himself."

Liddell caught her by the arm, led her to a chair. "I've got some coffee working." He disappeared in the direction of the kitchenette, reappeared with a steaming cup of coffee. A bottle of cognac was tucked under his arm. He laced the coffee with the cognac, pushed it into the girl's hand. "Drink that. But be careful. It's hot."

He dropped into a chair facing her, waited until she had taken a few long sips from the cup. Then he lit two cigarettes, passed one to her.

She took a deep drag, leaned her head against the back of the chair, blew a feathery stream of smoke ceilingward. Her round breasts strained against the flimsy blouse.

"I had a little talk with Frank Cole this evening after you left, Libby."

"Poor Frank. He must be nearly crazy. Losing his lead and director the same day."

Liddell smoked glumly. "He is. He had a lot of respect for Kurt's ability, apparently."

Libby shrugged. "As the Phantom, sure. But as anything else, Kurt was in left field."

"That's not what Cole thinks. He thought Kurt would have done well if he hadn't been typed. He was a good mimic, could make the cast laugh at his take-offs."

"That was one of the things that made Hal furious. Kurt would break up rehearsals with his silly imitations, and —"

"Was he any good doing a take-off of Hal?"

The slanted green eyes studied his face soberly. A puzzled frown wrinkled her forehead. "Why?"

"The telephone conversation Derbers picked up between Hal and Kurt. When Hal threatened to kill him."

"You're not getting to me, Johnny. What are you trying to say?"

Liddell grinned at her bleakly. "Hal never made that call to Kurt. He knew Kurt's phone was tapped. He'd have to be insane to put it on record that he was going to kill Kurt."

"But he did make the call. Derbers recorded it."

"That's what he was supposed to do." Liddell leaned back, sighed. "Here's the way I figure it. When Kurt found out that Hal had his phone tapped, he saw a chance to set up a self-defense plea if he were to kill Hal. He did a take-off of Hal threatening his life and put it on tape. Then, all he had to do was wait until Hal came home and play the record from some other phone and answer from his own. So, it wasn't Hal. It was Kurt playing

both roles — one on tape and one live."

The girl chewed on her full lower lip. "Go on."

"Once the threat was on the record, Kurt went to another phone, probably one in the lobby of his building and called Hal, daring him to come over and settle the whole mess."

"Then his plan miscarried. Kurt's the one who got killed. Remember?"

Liddell stared at her for a moment. "Did it miscarry?" He chain-lit a fresh cigarette, took his time about crushing out the butt. "I just said the recording was played from one phone and Kurt answered from his." His eyes moved from the ash-tray, met hers. "That means he had an accomplice."

Libby started to get up from her chair.

"You may as well hear the way I figure the rest of it." He waited until she had sunk back. "Kurt needed Hal into coming over to shoot it out with him because the accomplice had one other little job to do. She was supposed to fill Hal's gun with blanks. Then, after Hal was dead, Kurt would replace the blanks with shells."

The blonde stared at him, made no attempt to interrupt.

"But instead, his accomplice put the blanks into Kurt's gun so that he was a sitting duck for Hal. With Hal's threat on the record, she knew he wouldn't stand a chance. With all the evidence stacked against him the

chance of acquittal was almost nothing, wasn't it, Libby?"

The blonde continued to stare at him for a moment, then her lips parted in a taunting smile. "You ought to be writing the *Phantom* script, Johnny. You're real good. But you'd never get anybody to swallow that wild yarn."

Liddell shook his head. "Never in a million years," he conceded. "But you couldn't let well enough alone, could you? You had to kick over the whole apple cart."

"How?"

"What did you slip Hal when you went to see him? What did you tell him it was, sleeping pills?"

Some of the taunting quality drained from the smile. "I didn't slip him anything. He had them with him."

Liddell shook his head. "Not a chance. Before they bedded him down, he was searched to the skin, his shoelaces and his tie were taken away along with his belt. It's routine." He exhaled twin streams of smoke from his nostrils. "You got rid of the two men who were complicating your life, all right, but where do you go from here, Baby?"

The blonde studied his face from under lowered lids. "You couldn't prove a thing. But you don't have to try, do you?"

Liddell shook his head. "I don't intend to."

A self-satisfied smile wiped the worry from her face. "I'll make it up to you, Johnny."

Liddell consulted his watch. "You won't have the time, Baby. I figure you have twelve hours at most. By now, the medical examiner knows what was in those pills you slipped to Hal and both Herrnan and Neal are out checking to find out where you got it." His eyes ran over the girl's lush figure. "No drug clerk's going to forget a customer like you, Baby." He looked at her sympa-

thetically. "Twelve hours at the outside and they'll be coming for you. Just twelve hours — how are you going to spend it, Baby?"

Her glance met his levelly. "I guess I'll sleep. I have a few pills left. I guess I didn't realize how tired I was."

She got up, walked to the door. Standing in the doorway, she touched her fingers to her lips, blew him a kiss. Then she walked out.



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He felt the bullet and he knew he was dying. But nobody paid any attention . . .

BY ROY CARROLL

RENICK felt the impact of the slug under his left shoulder and staggered back against the department store window. There had been no sound of a shot. Gleaming cars streamed off at the green light

on the corner and one lingered, a black coupé, turned the corner past Renick and braked with a soft squeak.

An old lady, shoved and bumped by rush-hour crowds, paused to stare at him, biting her lip.

Pain came in a hot excruciating wave and he felt warm blood ooze

down his side. He closed his eyes tightly. *What's happened?* he thought. *What's happened to me?*

"Drunk?" somebody said.

"No," the old lady said. "He's sick. Won't someone — ?"

Renick opened his eyes, breathing rapidly, perspiring. He leaned against the plate glass window and tried to speak, but the words coughed in his throat.

A large man shouldered through. "You all right, mister?"

Do I look all right, you fool? Renick thought, shaking his head. *Do something!* Exasperation and pain wrung him back and, chin on chest, he saw the blood-soaked side of his white shirt. It frightened him. His jacket hid the blood from anyone's view.

"He's had a stroke," the old lady said.

"Yes, ma'am," the man said, thrusting at her with his elbow. "I'll take care of him. Run along now, ma'am."

The old lady went away.

"God damn it!" the man said. "Wouldn't you know?"

Renick stared into a pair of frowning blue eyes behind rimless glasses. The man wore a blue suit and stood directly in front of Renick, shielding him.

"My wife will be right along," Renick gasped, doubling up with pain. "Supposed to meet her here."

"Sure," the blue-suited man said. "Take it easy. You don't want to draw a crowd."

Pain sliced down into Renick and he felt the man's fingers clamp on his arm. The lenses on the man's glasses were bright yellow ovals, glaring at him as the evening sun's slant struck them. The man looked as though he never smiled.

"Come on, Renick — over to my car."

"How'd you know my name?" Renick managed. Something about the man was wrong. Numbness settled into him and when he moved, it was as if he were walking on his knees. He put his hand up near his shoulder and the fingers came away sticky with blood. A fresh spasm of bright pain lanced through him. People shoved by and he tried to say something. He choked, coughing.

"Let me help you," the blue-suited man said.

"No," Renick gasped. "Go away!"

But Renick couldn't prevent it. Rigid steel-like fingers clamped on his arms, thrust against his back, and the world of this late sunny afternoon spun and turned black around the edges. The strong hands held him up, forced him around the corner, walked him quickly away from the crowds of people.

"Keep those feet going, Renick!"

"No . . . call cop!"

He made no sense. His words were tongue-filled, remote.

"Be quiet, Mr. Renick. My car's right over here."

He fought with his feet, thrusting against the pavement, but only took shorter, harder steps, almost

running. He quit fighting, abruptly.

"That's better," the man said.

"I'm bleeding," Renick said. "Get a doctor."

"Sure. I'm *trying* to help you."

Renick looked at the man and felt foolish. "Car?"

"Right there," the man said, pointing at a black coupé.

The man supported him, shoved him. Renick tried to turn toward the car but the man wouldn't let him. They staggered toward an alley and the man forced him inside, breathing heavily.

"There!"

Renick saw the bleak scaled brick wall and the ground was gritty and wet underfoot. No sun reached this spot. He tried hard to think straight, but the world was rapidly going away from him. Why would anybody want to shoot him?

"You simply won't die, will you?" the man said. "I potted you from the car, but I didn't get you right, did I?"

Renick stared. "What?"

"Left the damned gun in the car, too," the man said.

Renick tried to run. The man flung him back against the alley wall. He tried to yell, but there was no sound — only a kind of hoarse moaning and then Renick saw the knife.

"God damn it," the man said. "It was perfect. Silencer and all. Light right, everything — and I had to miss." He struck Renick in the exact spot where he'd been shot.

"Why couldn't you just die so I wouldn't have to take chances?"

Renick watched the man hook the blade of the knife open with his thumbnail. The blade was long, slim, shiny, and Renick bent down and ran hard, blindly. He caught the man in the middle with his head, butting. The man sat down on the alley floor.

Renick staggered, sprawled out on the gritty brick, his hands clawing at the pavement beyond the alley.

The man cursed sharply. "Damn you!"

Renick struggled up, blind with pain, and ran. Something socked into his back. He reeled, fumbling with one hand. It was the knife, stuck into his back. He twisted, running again, and caught the handle and yanked. It came out. It hadn't gone in very deeply, but he felt new hot blood running down his back.

"Renick!"

He whirled, stumbling, and hurled the knife at the man.

A woman screamed on the corner. The blue-suited man stood against the wall just down past the corner, watching.

Renick ran hard, reeling against people. They leaped out of his way. He was by the department store again.

"Help!" he yelled. Something choked him, bubbling thickly in his throat. He swallowed, forcing the hot stuff down. "Laurie!" he called. "Laurie!" calling his wife.

He couldn't see her anywhere. She'd been wearing her red coat and that little red beret he liked so much. He ran up and down the sidewalk in front of the department store, stumbling from side to side and he supposed the man in the blue suit was here someplace. He didn't notice, but he left large wet red footprints and blood was dripping all over the sidewalk.

A woman saw the bloody footprints and screamed. The street began to scream and mill around Renick.

"Help me," he said, bubbling and staggering.

Nobody wanted to help him.

Renick waved his arms weakly, trying to tell them that a man in a blue suit was killing him. He'd been shot and stabbed in the back. He ran at a man and the man ducked away from him.

"Officer!" somebody yelled. "Police!"

It was as if he ran through a bright tunnel, as if the tunnel kept narrowing down, very bright — becoming brighter and brighter all the time. He wasn't even running now, though he thought he was. He just stood there in front of the store, lurching and reeling. Some of the men in the large crowd that had gathered began warily moving toward him, as if he were some wild animal.

Renick couldn't see very well. There was a bright cone and all around the cone was black. The edge

of the black was like fur and beyond that it was dead black. He fumbled along the plate glass window.

"What's the matter, man?" somebody said.

He cursed whoever it was — hopelessly, helplessly.

He stared stupidly at his feet and fell to his knees. His palms pressed flat on the warm pavement. He felt the blood on his back and side and chest and the cone of brightness became still brighter.

"He's bleeding," somebody said.

"Why don't somebody do something?" another said.

"Here's a cop," still another said. "Cripes."

"What's going on here?" an authoritative voice said. "What is this? Come on, now — break it up. Move along!"

Renick saw dark blue pants and heavy-soled shiny black shoes. A wad of gum stuck to the sole of one shoe. A cop.

"Mister — what's happened here?"

The cone of bright white narrowed down and went out, blinding Renick. He slowly straightened, flat on the pavement.

"Dead," the cop said.

The crowd moaned.

Down on the corner, a woman in a red coat and a tiny red beret spoke shortly, rapidly with a blue-suited man. The man nodded, turned away and dog-trotted quickly toward a black coupé. He got in the black coupé and drove off. The woman took a deep breath, looked

both ways before crossing the street toward the department store.

As she pushed through the crowd around the store window, she said, "What's happened? What's happened?"

"Guy dead," somebody said. "Shot."

She glanced back quickly down the street, biting her lip.

Then she managed to shove the rest of the way through the crowd and, without even looking at the body of her husband, because she knew very well it was there, she began to scream.



Classified Theft

Safe-crackers in Norfolk, Va., may not be unionized, but they work strictly within their classification. After they stole a safe from a Broad Street service station, they borrowed the station's truck to haul it away. The safe was taken to the city dump and looted of \$20. The burglars then returned the truck to the station.

Not Worth The Effort

Two men who robbed Charlie Jones, 78, of \$7 recently fled into brush-covered, muddy Trinity River bottoms near Dallas, Tex. A small army of police and highway patrolmen arrived for the manhunt. The officers floundered about in the wasteland to no avail. Patrol cars got stuck in the mud. Bloodhounds were called in, but they couldn't pick up the scent.

Finally someone suggested it might be better to give Jones \$7 and forget the whole thing. They took up a collection, and that's what they did.

Visual Evidence

When Mrs. Evelyn Snedeker, 22, was arraigned in federal court at Detroit on a charge of raising the amount of six money orders before cashing them, she was wearing only a pair of shorts and a blouse. She said she needed the money to buy clothes.

Reversed Third Degree

At Troy, O., John Weaver, 33, admitted 12 burglaries and three arson cases. He said he decided to confess "because I was getting such good treatment at the jail that I thought I'd return the favor."



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